Complete Guide to Film Scoring

The Art and Business of Writing Music for Movies and TV

Richard Davis

Complete Guide to Film Scoring
by Richard Davis

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Praise for Richard Davis's
Complete Guide to Film Scoring

"From his technical discussions to his fascinating interviews, Richard's book is one of the best resources on film/television scoring I have ever read. I wish I'd read it twenty years ago. It should be mandatory reading for everyone in the business—newcomers, veterans, students, and movie buffs."

—*Mark Snow, Composer for the* X-Files *and* Millennium

"Richard Davis's book, *Complete Guide to Film Scoring*, is very concise and thorough. It is excellent both as a novice's introduction to the subject and as a reference for professionals."

—*Mark Isham, Academy Award nominated film composer and Grammy winning recording artist for* A River Runs Through It

"This book gets right down to business. Clear, concise, comprehensive, and up-to-date, this is the most well written book on the subject of film scoring. I highly recommend it to music students, lovers of film, or anyone who has an interest in film scoring."

—*Richard Stone, Emmy winning Musical Director of* Animaniacs *and* Pinky and the Brain

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—*Richard Davis*

INTRODUCTION

This book is for anyone interested in writing music for movies or television. It takes the reader step-by-step through the art of film scoring, from the history of the field, through the process of writing the score, and finally to an explanation of the music business as it pertains to film and television composers. As a composer myself, I have worked with some of the top people in the business. In preparing this book, I interviewed over 20 of my colleagues—composers, music editors, music supervisors, and agents—and included their observations and anecdotes.

Successful film scoring is not a matter of just writing good music; it is writing good music that supports a dramatic situation. After teaching film scoring for several years at the Berklee College of Music, I have realized that the most important thing for the beginning composer to learn is how to approach writing this kind of music. This means finding the heart of the film, the soul of the film, and expressing that in music. No one can get inside a composer's head and tell them which notes to write. Every musician brings his own personal experience and musical point of view to a composition. But they can be guided and pointed in a certain direction, either by a teacher, a director, or simply a gut reaction to a particular scene. I have found that the best creative guidance I can give is to help someone find that heart of the picture in order to know what they want to express about it. That expression can then combine with other skills—compositional, technical, creative, business, and communication skills—to make a successful film score and a successful composer.

This is our approach in the Film Scoring Program at Berklee, and there are several dimensions to our program that are reflected in the structure of this book. First, it is invaluable to have an appreciation of the masters of film scoring, past and present. The chapters on the history of the field give an overview, and hopefully will inspire the student of film music to further study.

Second, every composer hoping to work in film scoring must know the process of film making and the evolution of a film score. The chapters on topics such as spotting, syncing, and music editing will give the reader an understanding of this process that many established composers had to learn on the job.

Third, and the most difficult to impart in a book, are the chapters on creating the score. With the help of my composer colleagues, I focus on the important concepts in writing a film score. Again, my aim is to point the reader in the right direction, and hopefully the interested student of film scoring will take the advice of several of the composers in this book, and study, study, study.

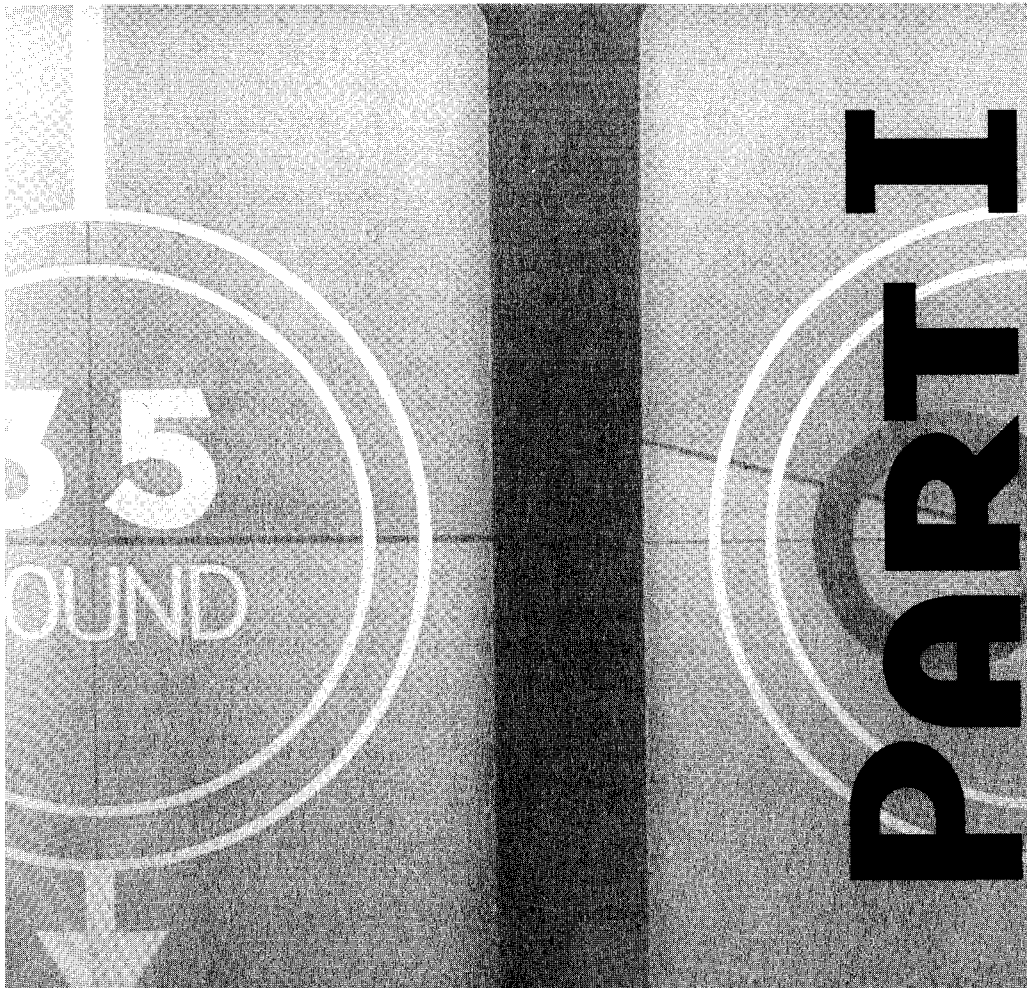
The final chapters discuss an issue that is necessary to the livelihood of every professional musician: the music business. Royalties, agents, attorneys, copyrights, and other topics of the film music business are addressed at length. This provides a basic understanding for anyone entering the field.

The book concludes with 19 interviews with some of the top composers and agents in Hollywood. These interviews provide an illuminating glimpse into the careers of those who are successful in this field. Their relationships with directors, stories of how their careers began, the ups and downs along the way, anecdotes about how specific scenes were written, and many other issues are discussed.

How does this music end up on the silver screen? What does it take to be able to compose it? Who chooses the composer? Who chooses what the music should sound like? How long does it take? How do the finances work? This book answers these questions and many others about the art and business of film scoring.

—R.D., Boston, May 1999

The History of Film Music



PART I

CHAPTER 1

Early Films and Music: The Silent Movies

Music in film is a vital necessity, a living force.
—Bernard Herrmann[1]

Music and drama. Drama and music. Either way, these two branches of the performing arts have been linked together for thousands of years in many cultures around the world. There is Japanese Kibuki, Indian Bharatnatyam, and the Balinese Monkey Dance. The early Greeks and Romans used choruses and orchestras to accompany their dramatic plays. In Europe, during medieval times there were pagan festivals that used music to accompany stories of gods and heroes, as well as liturgical dramas that portrayed various biblical stories through singing and dramatic action. During the Renaissance, music was used in various scenes in the plays of Shakespeare and others. In the Baroque period of classical music we find early opera and ballet, forms of musical drama that continue today. And finally, in this century we have the huge popularity of Broadway plays and film music.

In all these examples, the music and drama can be separated into independent entities, but their combination as a whole is greater than the sum of their individual parts. Overtures and arias from Mozart's or Verdi's operas are often performed independently and are musically satisfying. Some of these same operas exist as plays or books. But hear the aria as part of the staged opera and the effect is profound in a way that the play or music by itself cannot approach. Music for film is similar. Certainly a film composer can write good music that stands up on its own without the film. John Williams' Suite from *E.T., The Extra-*

Terrestrial is frequently performed in concert to great acclaim. But when heard in conjunction with the visual of the film, it is awesome and the whole film takes on another dimension.

It is often difficult for the modern 1990s audience to appreciate the experience of the film audience of even the 1940s or 1950s, much less the audience of the turn of the 20th century, when the technology of moving pictures was new. But try, for a moment, to put yourself in the shoes of the filmgoer in 1895. The common forms of long-distance communication were letters and the telegraph. The cutting edge of communication technology was the telephone, and only a tiny percentage of city dwellers had one in their homes or had ever used one. Horses and trains were still the primary modes of travel; automobiles were about as common as telephones, and the flight of the first airplane was still 10 years away. Electric lights were only 15 years old and gas lamps were still the prevailing method of artificial light. Einstein had yet to propose his Theory of General Relativity. Stravinsky was only 13 years old and Schoenberg's twelve-tone system of music was more than two decades in the future; music lovers were most familiar with Brahms, Wagner, Mozart, Verdi, Beethoven, and other 18th and 19th century composers.

Imagine now that you enter a small theater, or even a café with curtains closed against the light. A very noisy machine in the middle of the room starts up, and across a screen in the front you see the images of people, animals, and buildings. To you, the almost turn-of-the-century filmgoer, this is like a miracle. And yet at the same time the images seem disembodied, for there is no accompanying sound. The mouths might move, the horse might gallop, the car spews its fumes, but there are no words, there is no clippity-clop, and there is no chugging and banging of the engine. All is left to your imagination, for the only sounds you hear are the loud and noisy rotations of the projector's motor.

However, imagine you are in the same room and there is a pianist or small group of musicians playing while the picture moves on the screen. This adds another dimension to your experience, and even if the music is just background music with no dramatic importance, your previous impression of empty, disembodied images is transformed into a more complete experience. There are still no words, no hooves, no automobile engine noises. But the addition of music somehow makes the images on the screen more complete and less like two-dimensional shadows.

From the very beginning, there were probably musical accompaniments to films, though the first documented incidents were in 1895 and 1896 when the Lumiére family screened some of its early films in Paris and London with musical accompaniment. These were a great success, and soon orchestras were accompanying films in the theaters.

At first, the music that went with these films was taken from anywhere: classical favorites, popular songs, folk songs, or café music. There was little or no attempt to give the music a dramatic importance; it was there to enliven the audience's experience.

As the film industry grew and became more sophisticated, music in the theaters grew as well. Depending on the size and location of the theater, there could be anywhere from one piano or organ to a small orchestra. The player or music director would choose various pieces from the already existing literature and prepare them for performances.

In 1908, again in France, Camille Saint-Saens was commissioned to write what is believed to be the first film score tailored for a specific film, *L'Assassinat du Duc de Guise.* This score was successful, but because of the added expense of commissioning a composer, preparing the music, and hiring the ensemble, the concept of scores specifically composed for a film did not take hold.

However, many people in the industry were becoming aware that there was a need for standardizing music for films, if not specifically composing for them. Music was not yet an integral part of the drama on the screen; it was still simply an adjunct with little or no dramatic significance. And because of the logistical problem of composing for as many different kinds of ensembles as there were theaters, scores were only rarely composed for specific films.

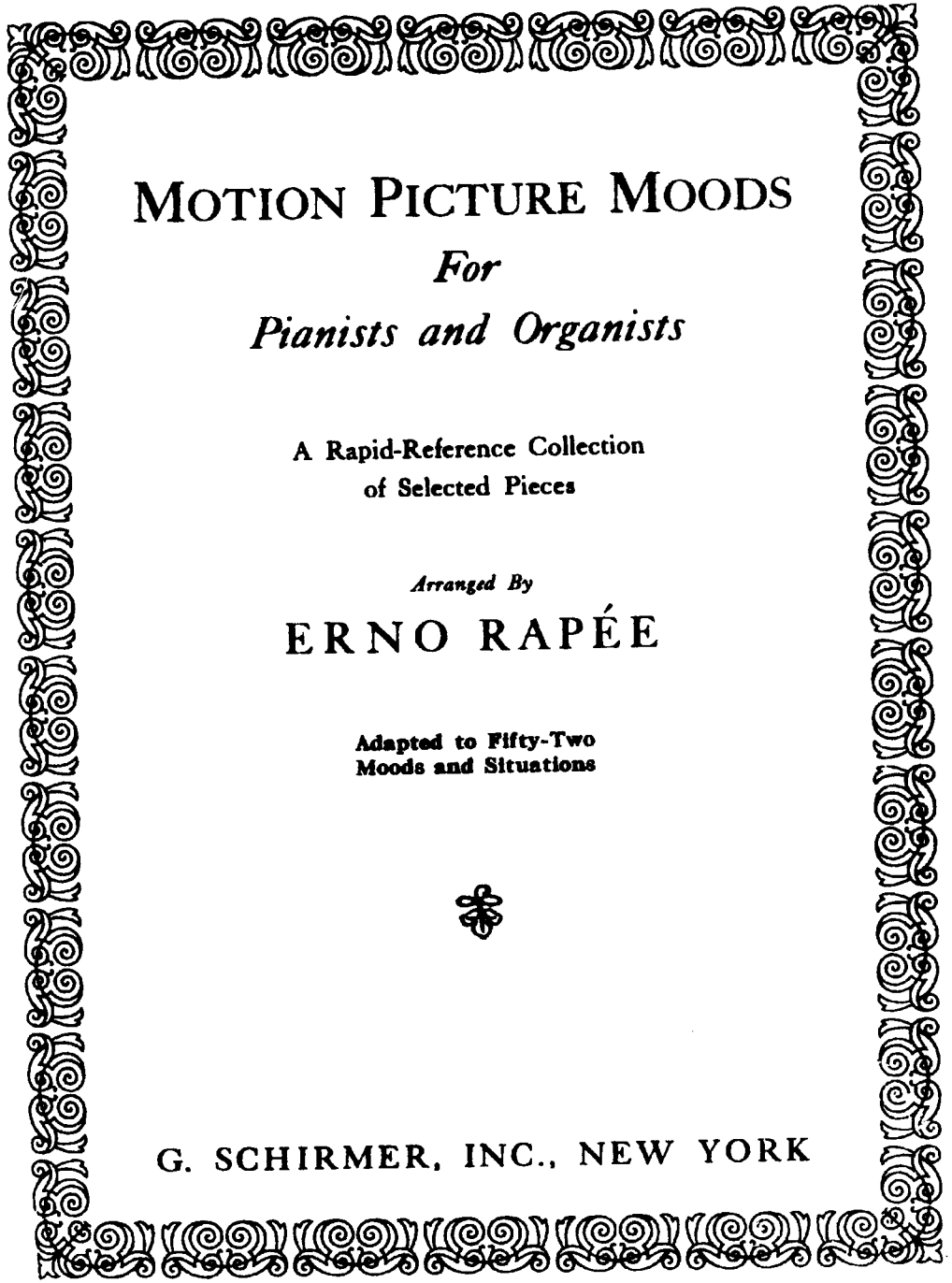
Music Fake Books

What did take hold, however, was a method of standardizing the musical experience of the audience, and a way of codifying what the musicians played. This happened with the publication of several books that provided many different pieces of music with different moods that could cover almost any dramatic situation. These books, of which the most well-known are the *Kinobibliothek* (or *Kinothek*) by Guiseppe Becce, *The Sam Fox Moving Picture Music Volumes* by J.S. Zamecnik, and *Motion Picture Moods*, by Erno Rapée, organized the musical selection to be played by dramatic category. The music director could simply determine the mood or general feeling of a particular scene, look up that idea in the book, and choose one of several possibilities. If, for example, he needed music for a very dramatic scene set in an evil castle, he might have seen these listings under "dramatic expression":

Night: sinister mood
Night: threatening mood
Magic: apparition
Impending doom
Pursuit, flight
Heroic combat
Disturbed nature: fire, storm

In addition, there were many other moods and also other main categories: Love, Lyrical Expression, Nature, Nation & Society, and Church & State. (See Figs. 1.1, 1.2, 1.3.)

The use of these books could be a cumbersome process, especially if there was more than one musician playing. The music director in each theater would view the film several times with a stopwatch and time each scene. He then would choose the individual pieces to be played, knowing how many seconds each piece should run. Much was dependent on the ability of the conductor or player to anticipate a scene change and to be able to extend or compress a piece. One of the most problematic areas became the transitions between scenes that had different pieces of music. A change in key center, tempo, instru-


MOTION PICTURE MOODS
For
Pianists and Organists

A Rapid-Reference Collection
of Selected Pieces

Arranged By

ERNO RAPÉE

Adapted to Fifty-Two
Moods and Situations

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Fig. 1.1. Rapeé.
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Fig. 1.2. Rapeé.
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10

Agitato No. 3

(Suitable for gruesome or infernal scenes, witches, *etc.*)

Otto Langey

Allegro agitato

mf *f*

26262

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Fig. 1.3. Rapeé.
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mentation, or overall mood could be very awkward without a written-out transition. Therefore, many musical directors created such transitions themselves.

The fake books were successful since they created a set musical script that any musician could follow. However, their dramatic effectiveness was limited by the ability of each theater's musical director.

A concurrent system whose inception actually predates the use of fake books was developed by Max Winkler, a clerk at Carl Fischer Music Store and Publishing Company in New York. Winkler realized that if he could see the films before they were released, he could then make up what he called "cue sheets" for each film (similar to modern-day cue sheets or timing notes, but not to be confused with them). These cue sheets would lay out the choice of music and give timings for how long to play each piece, as well as present guidelines for interpretation, in order to stay synchronized. The publisher would preview the film, create a cue sheet, then organize and sell a book for each film that was provided to the musical director of a theater. This benefited the film maker, for it provided a set musical script with rough timings. It also benefited the publishers of the music, for they could make a profit selling or renting the music itself to the theaters. Here is the cue sheet for an imaginary film that Winkler drew up the night he got the idea:

Music Cue Sheet for
The Magic Valley
Selected and compiled by M. Winkler
Cue

1. Opening—play *Minuet No. 2 in G* by Beethoven for ninety seconds until title on screen "Follow me dear."

2. Play—"Dramatic Andante" by Vely for two minutes and ten seconds. Note: play soft during scene where mother enters. Play Cue No. 2 until scene "hero leaving room."

3. Play—"Love Theme" by Lorenze for one minute and twenty seconds. Note: Play soft and slow during conversations until title on screen "There they go."

4. Play—"Stampede" by Simon for fifty-five seconds. Note: Play fast and decrease or increase speed of gallop in accordance with action on the screen.

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This is clearly imprecise, with the effectiveness of the mood and the accuracy of the timings dependent on the pianist or conductor's ability to interpret these instructions. However, the response from producers and from musicians was overwhelmingly positive. It gave them a musical script to follow that ostensibly followed the wishes of the film makers.

In actuality, both the *Kinothek* and Max Winkler methods were destined for short lives. Winkler's system debuted in 1912 and the *Kinothek* was published in 1919. By the late 1920s the revolution of "talkies," the first movies with their characters actually speaking in synchronized sound, were being distributed. It was this technological advancement that began the modern use of music in movies.

CHAPTER 2

The First Talkies: The Beginning of Synchronized Music

There was a time in this business when they had the eyes of the whole wide world. But that wasn't good enough for them, oh no, they had to have the ears of the world, too. So they opened their big mouths and out came talk. Talk! Talk!
—*Norma Desmond in* Sunset Boulevard

The use of sound in films revolutionized the way movies were made. Not only was there an amazing new dimension to the audience's experience, but the way a story was communicated had to be completely rethought. Previously, when the actors were silent, the film maker often had to convey or amplify an emotion, or make a certain point by use of lighting or camera angles. Because the actors were now talking on-screen, directors felt that they had to highlight them with clear, bright light. In addition, the camera angles stayed more static in order to focus on the speakers and the reactions of those listening. (Actually, this was also a technological requirement because the cameras were still very noisy and had to be enclosed in bulky, soundproof cubicles that were cumbersome to move around the set.) The effect of all of this was that the dialogue became the focal point of the film. The imagination of the audience was curtailed as the actors explained everything happening.

This meant several things for the musicians. First, a composer could provide needed insight into the emotional and psychological drama through the music. Second, he could compose a piece of music that would accompany the film wherever it was shown. Third, the shift towards sound pictures meant that thousands of theater musicians would be put out of work.

One of the interesting side-stories to the development of the film industry is that in the late 1920s there were quite a few studio owners who believed that the talkies were a passing fad. However, there were others who saw the commercial possibilities of movies with synchronized dialogue. During the mid-1920s several different technologies were being experimented with to synchronize picture and dialogue. In 1925 and 1926, several shorts were screened to the public by the Warner Bros. Studio to gauge the audience reaction. These were not dramatic films; they simply showed opera singers, trains, or other mundane events that included synchronized sound.

In 1927, nervous Warner Bros. executives premiered *The Jazz Singer* in New York. Starring vaudeville singer Al Jolson, this film had several musical numbers featuring synchronized sound. With seventy years of hindsight, it is easy for us to think, "What was the big deal? Of course everyone would love this new technology." But the reality of the time is that no one knew how audiences would react after thirty years of silent pictures. Although much of the spoken dialogue was still silent and the story told by narration "cards," when Jolson sang "Blue Skies" and "My Mammy," and the sound appeared to come from his mouth, the audience was thrilled. *The Jazz Singer* did terrific box-office business and became the film that showed the industry the way to go. It opened up a whole new era.

For several reasons, both commercial and technical, many of the first successful talkies were to be musicals. For about three years, until about 1931, a steady stream of musicals was produced. This was probably because of the entertainment value of musicals; not only did the actors speak, they also sang and danced. In addition, there was the logistical advantage of having the musicians on the set and often on camera. However, as with any fad, after several years of a steady diet of musicals, the public's interest in them soon waned. When this happened many studio executives thought there was no longer a need for musicians, and many of the studio orchestras were laid off. A yearlong period of adjustment ensued until the same executives found out how much they really did need the music.

Adding music to films at this time was an expensive, cumbersome, problematic process. In the very early days of talkies, there was no way to record the music separately from the rest of the production. All the musicians had to be present on the set, positioned in such a way as to be heard but not cover up the actors' lines. They could not make a mistake lest a whole take be ruined. This was a nightmare for all involved: musicians, actors, director, and soundmen. Sometimes a short song could take two or three days to record. In addition, there could be no edits afterward or the music would be ruined: the soundtrack would have jumps and blips.

The technology that was to free the music from the confines of the shooting set was the ability to record the music at a separate time, or "re-record" as it was known then. Developed about 1931, this allowed the music to be recorded on its own scoring "stage," so-called to distinguish the music recording building from the "sound stage" or film set building. It allowed the film maker to be able to put the music anywhere he wanted in the film, and it created the process we now call "dubbing," when the music, dialogue and sound effects are mixed together. Dubbing was yet another major technological advance, as it gave the director or producer control not only over where the music and sound effects would go, but also over how loud they would be in relation to the dialogue.

This new technology made the process of including music in films much more flexible and less expensive, and by the early 1930s, directors and producers began to accept that the film's underscore was a critical component. However, many still believed that the source of the music needed to be accounted for visually. Max Steiner, one of the giants of the early days of film scoring, described the situation:

> *But they felt it was necessary to explain the music pictorially. For example, if they wanted music for a street scene, an organ grinder was shown. It was easy to use music in a nightclub, ballroom, or theater scene, as there the orchestras played a necessary part in the picture.*

> *Many strange devices were used to introduce the music. For instance, a love scene might take place in the woods and in order to justify the music thought necessary to accompany it, a wandering violinist would be brought in for no reason at all. Or, again, a shepherd would be seen herding his sheep and playing his flute, to the accompaniment of a fifty-piece orchestra.*[1]

Such examples show the naiveté of many film makers at that time. Audiences had been accepting music with no need for a visual justification from the beginning of films. However, it was a period when the industry was finding its way and discovering what worked and what did not work in these new sound movies.

To address the perceived necessity that all music be justified visually, two distinct and diametrically opposed solutions of music use came into vogue. One was the use of constant music—a score that started at the opening credits and did not stop until the picture ended. The other was no music at all. Neither of these solutions was ideal, and it took some trial and error on the part of film makers to find one that worked. Ultimately, a system of bringing the music in and out of the picture as the drama required became the standard practice, and still is adhered to today.

It is interesting to note that between these early days of talkies and the contemporary films of today there have been very few successful movies that had absolutely no music. A revealing anecdote is that of *The Lost Weekend*, a 1945 film starring Ray Milland. This intense film about an alcoholic on a weekend bender was originally released without any music at all. When first shown in the theaters, at the most dramatic scenes of Milland's descent into an alcoholic blur, the audience snickered and giggled—exactly the opposite of the film maker's intent. It was quickly pulled from circulation, and almost permanently shelved. However, composer Miklos Rosza was brought in to do a score and the movie was re-released to great acclaim. It went on to win best actor, best picture, and best director, but the score was not acknowledged even though it was the only thing added to the original, failed version.

During the period of film music's infancy between 1927 and 1931, a clear progression can be seen. At first, the most common and obvious use of music in the talkies was as part of a musical with song and dance numbers. Upon the arrival of re-recording, producers went to the extremes and thought they didn't need music at all or had to have it all the time. Experiments were made with various kinds of *source music* (music that comes from a "source" on-screen), as in the Marlene Dietrich film, *The Blue Angel*. Theme songs were used, just as they are today, in order to promote the film and sell records and sheet music. And finally, directors began to play with the idea that music could come in and out of the soundtrack to support various types of scenes. Watching old films, you will notice that the concept of constant music was slow to die and was used in many films. However, the notion that music was a necessary part of film took hold and the underscore as we know it today began to take shape.

CHAPTER 3

The Studio System and The Studio Music Department

Music, one of our greatest art forms,
must be subjugated to the needs of the picture.
That's the nature of movie making.
—Sidney Lumet[1]

Much has been written about the Hollywood "studio system" in effect from the silent film era until the 1960s. Although we are primarily concerned with how this worked in relation to composers and musicians in general, it is worthwhile to briefly describe the overall "studio system."

In the early days of Hollywood, there were several large movie studios that produced the majority of films. These studios grew up during the days of the silent films, and the system of production they established then carried over to the talkies. Warner Bros. Studios, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer (MGM), Universal Studios, Paramount Studios, RKO, Twentieth Century-Fox, and United Artists were the most productive and longest lasting. As still happens today, many of these entities were constantly shifting in ownership and had varying degrees of profitability. They were also each known for having certain kinds of films. For example, Warner Bros. was known for swashbuckling adventure stories, Universal for steady production of "B" horror and comedy movies, and MGM for grand dramas.

This was the most productive time in the history of the film business in terms of the sheer numbers of films produced. It has been said that in contemporary times Americans go to a movie, in the 1930s Americans went to the movies. Back then, people would frequently spend the afternoon seeing a double feature, whereas today going to

the movies is an occasional evening out. In the 1930s approximately 80 million Americans (65% of the population) went to the movies *once a week*. Today, a much smaller percentage (under 10%) of the population goes to theaters regularly.[2]

In the summer of 1998 more people bought more tickets to movies (541.9 million) than any summer in history. However, since the population of the U.S. has grown so substantially since the 1940s, these statistics better reflect the movie-going public when expressed in terms of proportions to the general population.[3]

Because of the volume of films needed to satisfy the appetite of the movie-going public, the studios developed a system that was like an assembly line. It was efficient, streamlined, and somewhat insulated from the possibility of the temperamental manipulations of one creative individual. In other words, it was difficult for one person involved with the production, whether screenwriter, director, composer, editor, or others, to derail, hold up, or change the thrust of a production if they disagreed with the others. A new person would simply be brought in from the ranks of the studio staff, and work would continue. The only person with somewhat absolute power was the production executive, compared to whom even the stars had only limited power. If a particularly temperamental actor attempted to sabotage a production, the producer could control him by threatening not to give him any further projects for the remainder of his contract.

Each studio was a completely self-contained film-making factory where every aspect of the process was owned and controlled by the individual studio. The studio employed full-time contracted staffs of screenwriters, directors, producers, actors, extras, costume designers, hairdressers, carpenters, electricians, musicians, publicity agents, and others, spanning every possible job necessary to the making of a film. They had their own labs to develop the film and had complete post-production facilities for editing and dubbing. In addition, the individual studios also owned chains of theaters that showed only their films. The studio controlled not only the making of the film in every aspect, but also where, when and for how long it would be shown. (This ownership of the theaters was deemed illegal in 1949 and the studios were forced to sell off their theaters. It was only recently that Sony and others have found a way to own chains of movie theaters without violating U.S. antitrust laws.)

When a film started its journey through this studio assembly line, the producer pulled the strings and guided the process as it went through all the different departments. First, a group of writers would be assigned to create, complete, and polish the script. Note the operative word here is "group." Even though one writer would get screen credit, often it was a group effort. One person would write certain scenes, maybe love scenes. Another might write action scenes and yet another polish up the dialogue. There might also be a team of directors, each directing various scenes or different parts of the film. Various film editors would work on the project, as would teams of employees from the music, sound-effects, and costume departments. All of these workers were on staff at the studio. They could not work for any other studio, and they were obligated to follow the directions of the executives and supervisors of their departments.

The actors were also under contract to the studio, and especially at the beginning of their careers, had to do what they were told. Many stars were "groomed" by the studio; at a young age they were "discovered" and the studio would plan their careers and create roles specifically for them.

The producer and other studio executives were often involved in the creative process in a hands-on way. They would make creative decisions that might be in accord with the desire of the director(s), or they might be at odds. The producer's decision was the final word. The producer wielded much more power over creative decisions in those days of the studio system than they do today. In contemporary times, the director is responsible for delivering a final version of the film that is approved by the producers and/or studio. During the making of the film, the modern director has much more control over creative decisions than the director of the 1930s and '40s did, although his final cut of the film is still subject to approval.

Even though it seems impersonal, many great films were made by this process under the studio system. There were different styles to adhere

to in film making: romances, melodramas, epic adventures, etc., and the different creative people learned to adapt to a certain style in order to maintain continuity throughout the film. The music, as well, was produced on an assembly-line basis, and many composers and orchestrators had to learn to adapt to the desired style. This is one of the reasons that so many clichés sprung up in the Hollywood films and music of the 1930s; the different departments had to use them to stay within the boundaries of the required style. For example, they produced soaring violins for the appropriate love scenes, and growling low brass or strings for the bad guys.

Another reason that so many clichés were in use had to do with the sheer volume of films produced—there was hardly time to work out fresh, original, creative ideas within the given time constraints. Finally, there was a prevailing attitude amongst producers that existed then as it does today, which is that "if it works, do it again." In other words, there was a general reluctance to try new things, and a conservative desire to use what was tried and proven both in film making and in music.

The Studio Music Department

Starting in the late 1920s, the studios had music departments that were self-contained so that every stage of the music could be done in-house. They had staffs of composers, orchestrators, songwriters, rehearsal pianists, orchestra musicians, conductors, choreographers, music copyists, proofreaders, music editors (then called "music cutters"), and music executives to oversee the process. These people usually worked under one roof in a music building that contained a music library and a recording studio.

The head of the music department was often a composer or conductor, like Alfred Newman, who headed the music department at Twentieth Century-Fox for many years during the forties and fifties. He also had to be an executive who interacted with the studio executives, producers, directors, accounting departments, recording specialists, costume directors when musicians were on-screen, and actors when they were singing or playing. He had to have a firm grasp of budgets and time schedules, and be an accurate evaluator of the skills, strengths, and weaknesses of the composers and performing musicians in his department.

The music department head would be aware of the production schedule of a film, and would know when it was about to be ready for music. If the film was a top feature, then he might assign one well-known composer to score the project. However, many of the second level, B-films, would be assigned a team of composers. These composers would screen the film with others on the music production staff. Perhaps the director would be there, perhaps not.

After the composers began writing, their sketches would go down the line to the orchestrators, copyists, proofreaders, and finally to the orchestra. If there were songs or dance numbers, there were rehearsal pianists on staff to take care of them. Everyone had his own job; it was all compartmentalized. In actuality, this is very similar in process to modern film-score production, with two major differences. Today there is only one composer on a project, and today everything is contracted outside of the studio. All the above roles and jobs still exist, but it is not in one place under one roof, and it is not controlled by the studio to the same degree of detail.

The deadlines and the pace of this process in the 1930s was frighteningly rapid, even by today's standards. Composer David Raksin began his career as a film composer working with Charlie Chaplin in 1935, and he describes this process:

> *On the day when the new film was turned over to the Department for scoring, the staff gathered in our projection room. Present would be [the head of the music department], his assistant ... the composers ... two or three orchestrators, the head of Music Cutting and a couple of his assistants.*
>
> *By lunch we had "broken the film down" into sequences adjudged to call for music, determined what kinds of thematic material would be required and who would write it. After lunch, while the music cutters prepared the timing sheets that would enable us to*

synchronize our music with the film, [the other composers] and I went off to our studios to compose whatever specific material had been assigned to us. We would shortly meet again, with several versions of each theme, to decide which ones in each category would best serve our purposes, which were usually quite clear—though never defined; these themes were Photostatted and each of us got a set of all the material for that film. By that time the timing sheets were ready, so we divided the work into three parts, and each man headed for home to compose his third....

Sometimes there was time to orchestrate one's own sequences, but usually the rush was so great that by the next morning we were already feeding sketches to the orchestrators, and by noon they were delivering pages of score to the copyists. On the morning of the fourth day the recording would begin; the Studio had a fine orchestra under contract, and available on very short notice....

On the fifth day a couple of days of re-recording (dubbing) would commence. After that, there might be a brief respite, and then the process started again ... It was wild, and we all enjoyed it.[4]

Five days to compose, record and dub a film is unbelievably quick. Today, a composer usually takes two to eight weeks to write the music and three to ten days to record it. Once his work is complete, three to four weeks are spent dubbing his music and the other sounds into the film, and soon after that, it is ready to hit the theaters. This means that the film will be released between five and thirteen weeks after the composer first receives the locked picture (see chapter 8).

David Raksin relates another anecdote about studio composing schedules:

We did tremendous amounts of music. For instance, when I composed the score for Forever Amber, *that had about 110 minutes of music—about 100 of those I composed myself. The rest was music of the story's time. Originally I had twelve weeks to do that, but they were messing around with the movie, and by the time they got finished doing that I had eight and a half weeks to do that tremendous amount of music. And I did it!*

The budget and importance of the project would determine quality of the music and the amount of time given to write it. B films were rushed through. If the film had major stars and was high profile, as in *Forever Amber*, there would be one "name" composer who would have more time to write the score. Still, the process that ensued once the score was written remained the same; the music went through the pipeline from composer to orchestrator to music preparation to the studio orchestra.

CHAPTER 4

Musical Styles~1930 to 1950: The Golden Age of Hollywood

Study those who have preceded us: Korngold, Waxman, Raksin, Steiner. Learn what they did. Learn why. Learn how. Draw upon their genius, and your own understanding of the marriage of music and film will deepen.
—David Spear

Between 1930 and 1950, an average of 500 films per year were produced. At this time Americans were attending movies more frequently than at any other time in history. For this reason, this time period is known as the "Golden Age of Hollywood." It was an exciting time to be in the movie business; opportunities were many, and technology and the industry itself were growing to maturity from the infancy of silent pictures, constantly making strides and innovations, both technically and creatively. Film music also grew up during this time, finding its way to a language and a technique that is the foundation for what is heard even today.

The musical film-scoring vocabulary of the 1930s and '40s is still familiar to modern audiences. The release of many of these older films on video and their airing on television has enabled even those of us born after this "golden age" of movies to recognize the lush, orchestral sound of the early film scores. Though this sound can seem "corny" to 1990s ears, if we understand where these composers and film makers were coming from, then we can appreciate their artistic accomplishments.

During the silent film era, the music that was most familiar to audiences and thus was commonly used in films was that of the 18th and 19th century European classical composers, popular songs by composers such as Irving Berlin and George Gershwin, as well as some

well-known folk songs. When sound became a part of films in the late 1920s, there arose a great need for accomplished composers who could write scores that would appeal to the contemporary audience, and be dramatically synchronized to enhance the action on-screen. At this time there was an influx of European born composers who came to Hollywood, many of whom were Jewish and were fleeing political upheaval and persecution in Austria, Germany, and Eastern Europe. They had conservatory training from their native lands in composition, conducting, and performance, and therefore were well versed in classical music styles—especially those of the 18th and 19th centuries. They had an in-depth knowledge of the operas of Verdi, Wagner, Strauss, and Puccini, and were intimately familiar with the concert and chamber works of Beethoven, Mozart, Brahms, Schubert, Berlioz, and many others.

Of these émigré composers, several were quick to set a high standard for the Hollywood music community. These included Max Steiner, Erich Korngold, Branislau Kaper, Miklos Rosza, and Franz Waxman. A brief look at the musical achievements of two of these men, both before and during their Hollywood careers, will illustrate how the "sound" of the films during the Golden Age of Hollywood came to be.

Max Steiner (1888 to 1971) wrote over 300 film scores including *King Kong, Gone With the Wind, The Treasure of the Sierra Madre,* and *The Charge of the Light Brigade.* An Austrian immigrant who had written his first operetta at the age of fourteen, Steiner arrived in Hollywood in 1929. He was there as film music grew from infancy into a sophisticated art, and was one of the men that molded its growth. He became known for writing emotional, lyrical themes (as in *Gone With the Wind*), but was versatile and could provide any mood required. He used leitmotifs (themes, specific instruments, or both for a certain character or idea in the story) in many films, an idea borrowed from opera composers, especially Wagner. Most importantly, he was originally a composer of operettas, and so was well versed in the marriage of music and drama. It was this dramatic experience that gave him the sensitivity required to write effective film scores. And it was his training and foundation in 19th century composition that provided the necessary musical vocabulary.

Erich Korngold was also an Austrian refugee who was trained in the Old World conservatory system. But where Steiner's background was in operetta, Korngold's was in grand opera. Korngold was a child prodigy in his hometown of Vienna, and by the time he was fourteen, his praises had been sung by Mahler, Puccini, and Richard Strauss. By the age of nineteen, he had written three operas and was considered to be one of the shining lights of Europe. He was well known, well liked, and well off financially by the time he was in his early twenties. Mostly his career consisted of conducting in various European cities while he continued to compose opera and concert pieces.

In 1934, Korngold was invited to come to Hollywood to arrange Mendelssohn's famous incidental music to *A Midsummer Night's Dream.* Although the producer of the project had probably never heard of Korngold, at that time Hollywood producers scored status points by successfully raiding the artistic world of Europe. So Korngold journeyed to California with his wife and children, and spent several months adapting Mendelssohn's music.

This trip proved successful, and Korngold was intrigued by the possibilities of film music. He was to return to America twice in the next few years, finally coming for good when he realized that the political climate in his native Austria was becoming dangerous for a Jew.

Korngold only scored eighteen films in twelve years, and he worked under the best conditions possible. He had the right to turn down any project, and was given as much time as he needed to write the music. As with Steiner, it was his early training in opera that gave him the ability to come up with appropriate musical solutions for Hollywood films. In addition, the musical vocabulary of his German opera writing and that required by Hollywood films was the same.

There were many other fine composers working in Hollywood during this time, but these two are representative of the ongoing style and trend. The strongest musical influences for them were 19th century late Romantics: Wagner, Brahms, Mahler, Verdi, Puccini, and Strauss. The musical vocabulary of these composers became the most common and fundamental language of the music in early Hollywood films.

Much has been said and written about why this happened. A question often posed is: Why did it take so many years for the more contemporary and modern sounds of Stravinsky, Bartók, Ravel, and Schoenberg to find their way into the dramatic expression of popular films? The answer is twofold. First, the late Romantic period of classical music was the most familiar to the film-going audience. In 1935, they were only 50 years removed from Brahms' *Third Symphony* and many other contemporaneous Romantic works including Wagner's *Parsifal*, Tchaikowski's *Sixth Symphony*, and Strauss's *Till Eulenspiegel*. The melodic thrust, the harmonic structure, and the overall thematic development were musical events that the average film audience could easily grasp. No matter what the dramatic need of a scene, whether it be lyrical or turbulent, it could be expressed musically in a way that was easily understood. This was an important requirement of popular films. They were not aimed at an intellectual or academic audience. They were not even aimed at the most educated audience. They were aimed at the great middle. And although many Hollywood films made philosophical, moral or psychological points in their stories, they were not to be confused with the more "arty" movies of film makers such as Fassbinder.

The background of men like Steiner, Korngold and Waxman made them perfectly suited to accomplish the musical need of the time. Essentially 19th century composers writing in a late 19th century and early 20th century style, they were able to bring quality music to films. They had an excellent grasp of harmony, melodic development, and other compositional techniques such as passacaglia and leitmotif. They understood form and thematic development so that they could spin out a melody when necessary, or fragment it and tease the audience. And perhaps most importantly, they had thorough knowledge of the music dramas, the operas of the 18th and 19th century.

When movies were silent, the composer or player was simply an adjunct to a moving picture. He could amplify an emotion, telegraphing danger or sweetening a love scene. But with sound films where the actors were talking, then the role of the music changed significantly. The music had to interact with the dialogue of the actors and find a way to create the right mood, and at the same time stay out of the way of the voices. It needed to express and mirror the emotion of the actors as well as sometimes bring these emotions to a ringing conclusion. The music needed to develop as the story developed and move the plot along. The experience of the European composers in writing opera made them ideally suited to this task.

One listen to (or attendance at) a Wagner, Verdi, or Puccini opera would illuminate this point dramatically. The use of music from start to finish, the thinning out of the orchestra during recitative (dialogue), the grand crescendos and emotional outbursts at high points of the drama, and the use of leitmotif in opera are no different in concept from the marriage of music and film during the early days of Hollywood.

In opera, sometimes the same musical idea or phrase might keep returning to reinforce the audience's understanding and response to an idea or emotion in the film. Max Steiner's score to *Gone With the Wind* did just this. There were seven different motives or themes representing different characters or situations, and they return periodically throughout the film. Korngold's score to *The Adventures of Robin Hood* (1938) had a theme for the Merry Band, a theme for Marion, one for Robin Hood, and yet another for the Sheriff of Nottingham. (Note that this technique is still used in modern times, but with a more contemporary music language. John Williams' score to *E.T. The Extra-Terrestrial*, and Alan Silvestri's score to *Forrest Gump* are but two examples.)

In addition to thematic organization, as more and more scores were recorded over the years, certain conventions came to be used. This has always been the case and still is today, for it is really prevailing conventions that make up a given style. In the 1930s those conventions were numerous, and sometimes born out of necessity. For though all the composers, even those working on "B" films, were highly skilled, the time crunch they worked under was often outrageously short.

We chuckle today at some of these 1930s conventions, for they seem so dated. But every generation of films has had its musical style. There were love themes with soaring violins often in octaves, brass in fourths and fifths whenever there were Romans, Greeks, or medieval kings, and string sections seemingly ubiquitous throughout a film, providing

a warm, rich, and lush blanket upon which both dialogue and acted-out emotions could sit. But in the eyes and ears of the 1930s audience, these conventions were as effective as the mournful quasi-Irish sounds in the score of *Titanic* today.

New Ideas in Music

The 19th century romantic style of Korngold and Steiner was used in films through the 1950s. But during the 1940s, new ideas were introduced slowly. Composers like David Raksin and Bernard Herrmann were expanding the range of possibilities by introducing elements of jazz and contemporary 20th century music. Scores like *Laura* (1944) and *Citizen Kane* (1941) did much to open up the minds and ears of the movie industry to new sounds. For example, Raksin wrote a 12-tone score for *The Man With a Cloak* (1949).

David Raksin:

> Man With a Cloak *had a 12-tone row, the first five notes of which spelled E-D-G-A-R. The R became D♭ so it was still Re. I saw Johnny Green (head of music at MGM) the next day and he said, "Gee that's a remarkable score, what's that crazy god-damned tune you've got there?" And I said, "Johnny, it's a 12-tone row." He was astonished because it sounded so much like a theme and wanted to know why I used a row. I told him it was because in this picture you don't find out until the last 45 seconds or so that the hero, the man in the cloak, is really Edgar Allan Poe.*
>
> *I had a great time doing what I was doing. Sometimes I was motivated by jazz, sometimes by contemporary music. You would have to be crazy not to feel the enormous effect of the music of Stravinsky. For me it was Stravinsky and Berg. So I just wrote the way I thought I should be writing.*

Raksin also points out that, as film music drew its influences from what musical styles were popular, it also influenced those styles. Contemporary music, or dissonant music that was not accepted by audiences for the concert stage, would be accepted in the appropriate scene of a film. Raksin again:

> *If you have a really violent sequence and you write something that is really dissonant, they wouldn't like to hear that as a [concert] piece of music. But they will accept it if it is the right music for a film sequence.*

New ideas, such as twelve-tone rows and other modern compositional techniques, were slow to gain popularity in film scores. However, producers, directors, and the composers themselves gradually saw the dramatic value of these methods, and musical styles in films began to change.

CHAPTER 5

Musical Styles 1950 to 1975

Putting music in a film is not an arbitrary thing.
There's a form and a shape, an overall
pattern of where you put music in.
—Jerry Goldsmith[1]

In any discussion of artistic and historical styles and eras, it seems to be human nature to want to delineate and mark a specific date, year, or piece that ushers in the new era. But it is never really so cut and dry. Monteverdi did not wake up on the morning of January 1, 1600 and proclaim, "Ah-ha, let us begin the Baroque period of music!" Beethoven knew he was breaking away from the old classical style of Mozart and Haydn, but he was not consciously creating a new musical period called "Romanticism." Most new trends are the result of evolution, drawing upon the old and breaking ground for the new. Film scoring styles are no different. The Romantic style of Steiner, et al, remained prominent for about twenty years, from 1930 to 1950. But there were signs of experimentation, and certain scores written during that time seem to point to the future use of more dissonance, atonality, and eventually popular, jazz, and rock vocabulary in scores.

Remember that by the late 1930s the art of synchronizing music with film was quite new—only ten years old. Although composers, directors and producers were still heavily reliant on conventions that were tried and proven, there was always the occasional innovation that stood aside from the crowd. In 1941, in the midst of the Romantic style of Korngold and Steiner, a film was released that was to break the mold of the time, both visually and aurally. This was *Citizen Kane*, a film by Orson Welles with a score by Bernard Herrmann. Many of the more modern compositional techniques used by Herrmann in this film were not in common use until the 1950s—he was about ten years ahead of the pack. What *Citizen Kane* pointed to was the eventual use of con-

temporary sounds and textures influenced by Bartók, Stravinsky, Schoenberg, and other 20th century composers. In addition, it presaged the rise of American-born composers in the film industry.

By the early 1950s, there were many conservatory-trained American musicians working for the studios as composers, orchestrators, pianists, songwriters, and arrangers. This included Bernard Herrmann, David Raksin, Alex North, George Antheil, Leonard Rosenman, Elmer Bernstein, André Previn, and Jerry Goldsmith. With a firm grounding in traditional harmony, theory, and counterpoint these men had not only studied the new music of Bartók, Schoenberg and Stravinsky—many of them also had a thorough knowledge of jazz styles.

Although Steiner, Korngold, Waxman, and others of the previous generation were often "genius" composers, they remained, for better or worse, heavily rooted in 19th century music and somewhat uninterested or even opposed to newer musical styles. When asked to comment about contemporary music, Max Steiner said: "I have no criticism. I can't criticize what I don't understand."[2] This comment really points up the difference between the old and new generations of film composers.

One composer working occasionally in films who was a great influence—not only on film music, but on all of classical composition—was Aaron Copland. By the time he scored his first film, *The Heiress*, in 1949, he was a world-renowned composer of ballet, symphonic, and chamber music. He only scored a few other films after that, including *The Red Pony* and *Of Mice and of Men*, but Copland left a large musical impression on all who followed. In fact, it was his ability to convey drama in the music to the ballets *Rodeo* and *Appalachian Spring* that brought him to the attention of Hollywood producers. He brought a new and fresh sensibility in his use of instrumentation and harmony. The instrumental textures in Copland's film scores are softer than the big Romantic scores of the time. He used smaller ensembles and avoided the big, overblown orchestral tuttis found in many films. His use of pandiatonic harmonies, polytonality, and controlled dissonance was imitated by many composers.

Aside from musical development and evolution in films, there were several other factors both in the kinds of films released and in American culture itself that must be taken into account when considering the sound of movie music in the 1950s. Perhaps the most important of these is the arrival of the invention of television. There was also the popularity of "rebel" films—films dealing with youth, rebellion and the darker issues of life including alcoholism and drug addiction. The McCarthy committee of the United States Congress, which instigated and led a witch hunt for Communists in many industries, but especially the entertainment industry, had an impact not only on who worked and who didn't, but also on the content of the films themselves. The rise of jazz—big-band swing and bebop—created a new musical culture, especially amongst the nation's youth. Add to all of these events and trends the birth of rock-and-roll music in the mid-fifties, and the need for new styles in film scoring can be clearly seen.

The Arrival of Television

Beginning in the late 1940s television was readily available to the general public. As the cost of TV sets became more accessible, and as more programming was aired by the networks, more and more people made TV a regular part of their lives. At first, the Hollywood studios looked down on this technology as someone might look askance at an unwanted relative who shows up uninvited for dinner. They refused to release their catalogue of movies to television stations, and did not produce shows for TV. In many cases, the studios hoped and believed television was going to be a passing fad. As we know today, they were quickly proven wrong.

In retrospect, it is not so difficult to see why many Hollywood people had a hard time accepting television. This new form of entertainment arrived only twenty years after the arrival of talkies. The studio system was powerful, smoothly oiled, and very profitable, and many people were very comfortable with it. The "Golden Age" of films was generating millions and millions of dollars in profits from the millions of people that attended movies on a regular basis.

In 1946, an estimated revenue of 1.7 billion dollars was generated by theatrical movies. By 1962, this figure was down to 900 million dollars, just over half the 1946 amount. This was the effect that TV had on the movie business. It threw studios, executives, actors, and all the creative people into turmoil as a new playing field and a new ball game were created.

The period from 1955 to 1970 also saw the demise of the old studio system. Two factors were most important in contributing to this: the advent of television, and a court decision citing antitrust laws that required the studios to break up their chains of self-owned theaters. This was a true "double-whammy." First of all, the popularity of TV meant that many people stayed home and stopped attending movies in the theaters, causing a severe drop in revenues. Secondly, with the loss of the studio-owned theater chains, they lost the automatic distribution of a studio-produced film. Previously, a studio could make a film, and no matter how good or bad it was, release it to as many theaters as they wanted, for as long as they wanted to keep it in circulation. Under the new system, if a film was not accepted publicly, the independent theater owner could withdraw it. In addition, because the audience now had the option of staying home and watching TV, if the film wasn't of fairly high quality, or if it didn't strike a chord in the populace, it would fail in the theaters.

With a real pinch in the flow of cash, the studios could not afford to keep thousands of people under contract. So they had to let go of many employees: actors, directors, musicians, and even producers. In the space of a few short years, the dynamic of producing a film completely changed. Producers became independent, using studios to provide financing, a place to shoot, and a distribution network. No longer could the studio control everything from start to finish, though they could approve or disapprove the final product. But the process itself became removed from studio control. Those involved in the production could move from studio to studio as the projects required. This became the norm for all involved in film production, including the composers.

After a few years of refusing to show films originally released in the theaters on television, the studios finally relented in an attempt to gain at least some profit from the new technology. This gave rise to the TV shows that featured movies from the studio's catalogue, albeit frequently edited for length and content, and often interrupted for commercials. This marked the defeat of the anti-TV forces in Hollywood, and was the first step toward fully mobilizing the extensive studio machinery to include the production of television shows. It was only a short time before the studios were actively involved in producing sit-coms, dramas, and TV movies.

The New Music and the Composers Writing It

There were many composers and many films that are excellent examples of the different kinds of scores written in the 1950s and 1960s. Several are worth mentioning because they broke new ground, or in some other way stand out from the rest.

One of the young composers making a mark on Hollywood was Alex North. Brought from New York to Hollywood by director Elia Kazan, his score to *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1951) was a landmark musical event. For the first time, a raw, edgy, and modern sounding score with many jazz elements was accompanying a popular film. It was not only the use of jazz but also the use of dissonance (influenced by modern classical composers) that gave this score a unique flavor. This opened the floodgates for other composers to incorporate jazz into their scores and a whole new musical style began.

In 1953, Kazan again gave an opportunity to a young composer. Juilliard-trained composer Leonard Rosenman wrote a score to *East of Eden*, starring James Dean. Another dissonant, edgy score accompanying a successful film with a popular star did much for establishing that dissonance as an acceptable sound both in the ears of the audience and the minds and pocketbooks of the producers.

In addition to the darker kinds of films that were being produced, there was also a great deal of activity in producing big epics, often based on biblical stories. These films, like *Ben-Hur, The Ten Commandments, Quo Vadis, El Cid*, and many others, required a more conservative score harkening back to the Romantic approach.

Some composers, such as Elmer Bernstein, had the facility to write a contemporary, edgy score like *The Man with the Golden Arm* and then switch gears and write a Romantic score to an epic or adventure film. Here is Elmer Bernstein speaking about creating the score to *The Ten Commandments* (1955) according to the musical tastes of director Cecil B. DeMille:

> *DeMille was a great Wagner lover. His concept of film scoring was utterly simple and very Wagnerian. Every character had to have a theme or motif. In addition to the characters having themes and leitmotifs, certain philosophical concepts had to have motifs too. God, good, and evil each had to have a theme. The idea was that whenever a particular character was on the screen, his theme had to be present as well. It was all very Wagnerian.*

Because of the leitmotif nature of the score and DeMille's desires, this score was more Romantic than modern in its musical language. That is what was necessary, and yet it didn't prevent Bernstein from being able to create a jazz score to *The Man With the Golden Arm* in the same year.

Another composer to take on scoring several epic films was Miklos Rozsa. A Hungarian-born composer with a doctorate in music, Rozsa had a passion for musicology. For films involving historical subjects, he did extensive research and tried to create a musical sound that was palatable to the average audience, yet based on real historical musical premises, motives, and instruments. His scores to *Ben-Hur, El Cid, Quo Vadis*, and others are large, grand and well thought out. They established a standard to which many composers writing these kinds of scores had to bear up.

Theme Songs and Rock 'n Roll

In every period of movies there has been the issue of the theme song, pop song, or end-title song. From the early days of sound films, producers realized the financial benefits of having a hit song. Not only could they entice more people into the theater to see the film, but they could sell more records (CDs in modern times) and sheet music. And because they owned the copyright to the song, they could collect on performance royalties if the song became a radio hit. This "theme song" craze has never really been a craze; it has always been present, only sometimes the frenzy has been slightly greater than others. Every era has had its hit songs, from the '30s and '40s onward to today and the success of "My Heart Will Go On" from *Titanic*.

A significant wave of theme songs began in the 1950s with the huge popularity of the song, "Do Not Forsake Me, Oh My Darlin'," written by Dimitri Tiomkin and Ned Washington for the movie *High Noon*. However, the popularity of this song doesn't come close to the ongoing success of Henry Mancini's 1961 hit, "Moon River," from the film *A Breakfast at Tiffany's*, starring Audrey Hepburn.

Mancini was another Juilliard-trained composer with a strong jazz background. He had his first major success with the theme for the 1958 TV show, *Peter Gunn*. Then there came "Moon River" followed the next year by "The Days of Wine and Roses" for the film of the same name. He went on to score dozens of films of every dramatic style, but remains best known to the general public for "Moon River," "The Days of Wine and Roses," and the scores to the Peter Sellers comedy series, *The Pink Panther*.

By this time, the early 1960s, producers could not get enough of the theme song. The producer of the film *Dr. Zhivago* was so enthralled with Maurice Jarre's melody to "Lara's Theme" that he basically discarded much of the original score and substituted tracks of the song melody. Later in the 1960s we get "Raindrops Keep Fallin' On My Head" in *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*, and "Mrs. Robinson" in *The Graduate*.

What these songs did was pave the way for a different use of songs in film. Instead of having the song be sung by a character on screen, or be part of the credits, all of a sudden a pop song, which is seemingly disembodied from the film, became an integral part of the soundtrack. The style evolved where a song was just "dropped in" to the movie soundtrack. Maybe the lyrics were applicable, maybe not. Maybe there was a dramatic reason to have a song, maybe not. For some producers, the only reason to have a song in the film was to hope it became a hit, generated lots of royalties, and caused people to go see the film. And as the popularity of theme songs grew, at least amongst Hollywood producers, more and more films came to rely on songs rather than specifically composed instrumental underscores.

Another factor contributing to this was the rock 'n roll soundtrack. Beginning with the beach movies of the early 1960s, given a mighty push forward by the Beatles films, *A Hard Days Night* and *Help*, and coming to full fruition with the cult classic, *Easy Rider*, films consisting completely of rock songs as underscore became vogue. As the dark, edgy films of the '50s appealed to that audience, these rock 'n roll films of the 1960s were aimed at the ever-expanding audience embracing the values of the "Woodstock generation." They were pertinent and popular. And truly, the use of songs was completely appropriate. How else to express the tone of those times but through the music of popular songs? The Grateful Dead. Simon and Garfunkel. Bob Dylan. Buffalo Springfield. Steppenwolf and The Flying Burrito Brothers were perfect for *Easy Rider*. This was absolutely the right music in the right place for certain films.

The problem that arises when this kind of trend hits is that producers and directors jump on the bandwagon rather blindly. When something new works in one movie, there are always several people doing imitations within a short period of time. So instead of choosing a style of music that serves the dramatic intent of the picture, they choose music that they believe is popular or will sell a lot of records. This was a problem in the 1960s, and it is still a problem today.

This is not to say that instrumental underscore in the 1960s became a lost art. Although some prevailing trends favored rock songs, and even jazzy underscores (*The Pink Panther*, some of the James Bond movies), there were many excellent orchestral-type scores. Elmer Bernstein's score for *To Kill a Mockingbird* is a beautiful example of the marriage of compositional structure and dramatic intent. Many other composers of note were active in keeping alive the orchestral vocabulary, including Jerry Goldsmith, Leonard Rosenman, John Barry, Georges Delerue, Maurice Jarre, and John Williams. The trends became parallel. One kind of movie still used traditional orchestral scores, another used pop and rock songs, another kind used jazz-influenced scores, and yet another used more dissonant and avant-garde twentieth century compositional techniques. The possibilities were expanding even as they were heavily weighted towards songs and jazz music during the 1960s.

CHAPTER 6

1975 to Today

I think music is one of the most effective ways of preparing an audience and reinforcing points that you wish to impose on it. The correct use of music, and this includes the non-use of music, is one of the greatest weapons that the film maker has at his disposal.
—Stanley Kubrick

During the 1960s and into the 1970s, as films incorporated scores of many different styles, audiences became accustomed to the pop/rock sound and modern dissonance instead of 19th-century-influenced orchestral underscore. This paved the way in the subconscious awareness of the public to accept what was coming down the road in the 1980s and '90s: the pop flavored orchestral score. But in the '60s and '70s, perhaps the biggest influence on what producers put in the theaters was television.

Many TV themes and underscores were heavily jazz and rock flavored. In an attempt to modernize the shows and make them different from "stuffy" film scores, the producers incorporated contemporary popular music. Mancini's *Peter Gunn*, Lalo Schifrin's *Mission Impossible*, Neil Hefti's *Batman*, and many others reflected this use of jazz and rock. In addition, twelve-tone and other methods of atonal composition began to be heavily used by television composers. In television, because the schedules and demands of a weekly series meant the composer had to work quickly and efficiently, twelve-tone became a valuable tool for writing tense or suspenseful scenes. Once again, in yet another way, audiences became accustomed to a new musical vocabulary. In the space of just fifteen or twenty years, from about 1950 onward, a whole new world of musical sounds became possible, and many composers took advantage of this.

One score that is representative of the new kinds of textures used by composers in the early 1970s was Jerry Goldsmith's *Chinatown*, starring Jack Nicholson. In this score, Goldsmith used four pianos, two harps, one trumpet, and strings. The pianos were often "prepared," a technique where various objects are put on the strings to change the sound; the piano is intentionally detuned, or the player actually plays the strings inside the piano rather than the keys. This created a uniquely dark and mysterious texture that dovetails beautifully with the rhythm of the film, the way the film is lit, and Jack Nicholson's acting.

In his score to *Patton*, Goldsmith used another unusual technique, that of "sweetening," or adding an instrument after the main music tracks have been recorded. In this case he took a short motif on trumpet and recorded it several different ways with a lot of echo. This little idea was then dropped in wherever needed regardless of the harmonic and metrical consequences. It created a disjointed feeling, reflecting the odd and sometimes otherworldly aspect of the character of General George Patton.

These interesting and unusual devices were becoming more common in the early 1970s. As 19th century harmony, contemporary 20th century techniques, jazz, and rock collided together in the entertainment industry, a myriad of possibilities opened up. Audiences gradually became used to hearing strange dissonances, and even came to associate certain impending events with specific musical sounds. Add to this mix the new technology of multitrack recording (early 1960s), and the possibilities expand even more. The film composer's palette was larger and more varied than ever, but during the 1960s through the early 1970s, orchestral scores, though still used, had fallen somewhat out of favor. It was a succession of two scores—one melodramatic and suspenseful, the other big, dramatic and traditionally Romantic in style, that were to create a resurgence in orchestral scores.

Orchestral Scores Return to Stay

The year 1974 saw the release of the Stephen Spielberg film *Jaws*, which was to become one of the classics of suspense and drama. Spielberg and composer John Williams chose to use a more traditional orchestral sound for *Jaws*, and the success of this decision and the resulting score has often been credited with beginning a resurgence of the use of traditional orchestral sounds and a Romantic, or perhaps neo-Romantic musical vocabulary. However, even though *Jaws* was a milestone in the return of the use of a traditional orchestra, there was yet another John Williams score that made movie music come alive in the ears (and the eyes!) of the audience.

In early 1976, the first trailers (previews attached to other films) for the motion picture *Star Wars* appeared in American theaters. Believe it or not, those audiences laughed and jeered at the trailers, causing great consternation for George Lucas and the studio. However, when the film was released it became one of the all-time most popular films, making huge profits not only from ticket sales, but from ancillary merchandising as well. And many give the exciting score by John Williams a fair share of the credit for the film's success. From the moment the opening scroll gave the story background, and the bold *Star Wars* theme was heard, the audience knew that something special was about to happen.

According to Williams, when he first viewed the work-print, it had a temporary music track cut from the 1916 Gustav Holst piece, *The Planets*. He originally was asked to edit this well-known classical score, re-record it, and fit it to *Star Wars*. However, he convinced the producer and director that he could do something original in that style, and make it fit even better. The result is one we all know today: the wonderful themes for the Rebellion, the dark and ominous Darth Vader theme, Princess Lea's theme, and other fine musical moments are familiar to musicians and non-musicians alike. Using a large symphony orchestra and recording in London with the London Philharmonic, Williams brought back the symphonic score to the ears and eyes of filmgoers.

This was not exactly a return to the Romantic style of Korngold and Steiner. The score to *Star Wars* has many elements of Romantic musical language: lyrical themes, exciting brass tuttis, and delicate woodwind writing, but this new kind of orchestral score was not afraid to incorporate contemporary compositional techniques where necessary. John Williams was schooled at Juilliard and UCLA, and has

a thorough knowledge of many different styles of composition, including jazz, 12-tone and atonal techniques. So the score to *Star Wars*, and many scores of Williams and others that followed this lead, fused elements of tonal 19th century writing with whatever textures or effects they wanted to use from the 20th century: Impressionism, jazz, rock, pandiatonicism, 12-tone, even aleatoric, or "chance" music.

None of this was new in film scoring; examples of all these techniques abound through the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s. But something happened when *Stars Wars* was released that caused a shift in the way orchestras were perceived, in the acceptance by the audience of the music as a dramatic effect, and in the popularity of this music. It was one more milestone in the constantly developing art of film scoring.

In 1982, another Spielberg directed film with a John Williams score took the film-going world by storm. This was *E.T., The Extra-Terrestrial*, a magical film with an enchanting score that was loved by adults and children alike. Indeed, Spielberg has said, "John Williams *is* E.T.," emphasizing how important the music was to the emotional impact of that film. Again, as in *Star Wars*, Williams combined a lyrical, tonal style with elements of 20th century styles. (For examples of this modern influence, check out the scenes where E.T. drinks the beer from the refrigerator, and when the children take E.T. trick-or-treating.)

The popularity of these kinds of scores opened the door for many other composers to follow suit and incorporate any possible sound they wanted. But the film-scoring industry was about to undergo a massive infusion of new sounds and possibilities, and the whole business of film music was to shift yet again as it absorbed the new technologies of synthesizers and the personal computer.

Synthesizers and Computers: A Whole New Ballgame

It is ironic that only a few short years after the resurgence of the orchestral score, the score created entirely, or mostly, using electronic synthesizers became all the rage. Around the late 1970s, synthesizer technology had progressed to where keyboards were affordable. Previously synthesizers had been used in movies, but the ARP and Moog were

large, expensive, and cumbersome machines that required a huge amount of expertise to operate. The new technology quickly caught on, and the manufacturers were wise enough to create MIDI, Musical Instrument Digital Interface, a language that allowed synthesizers and computers of any manufacturer to interface or talk to each other.

The score that caught the public's attention, and made every producer in Hollywood want the same thing, was Vangelis's score to the 1981 film, *Chariots of Fire*. This score was entirely electronic, with no acoustic instruments at all. The synthesizer technology at the time was primitive compared to today. All Vangelis had to work with were analog synthesizers, since digital had yet to arrive. There was no sampling, digital editing, or hard-disk recording. The various synthesizer sounds were recorded to a multitrack analog tape machine in Vangelis's home studio.

The impact of this score cannot be overstated. It opened the ears of producers, directors, composers, and the general public to the possibility of using electronic sounds in a lyrical manner. Previously, synthesizer and other electronic sounds like the theremin were used in high intensity dramatic situations and science fiction films. They were usually part of a scary, spooky, or otherworldly musical landscape. Vangelis, in one stroke, showed the world that it could be otherwise.

Not only did this score make a huge impact on the success of the film, but it became a commercial hit, selling millions of records and tapes, and getting serious radio airplay. Of course, many producers jumped on the bandwagon and wanted a similar kind of sound for their films. Since Vangelis clearly could not do them all, it meant that other, more traditionally-minded composers would learn the new technology to one degree or another.

The availability and affordability of synthesizers in the mid-1980s was actually embraced by many composers, both the up-and-coming youngsters and the older generation. What open-minded musician could turn his back on the possibility of adding yet another entirely new dimension of sounds to his palette? Jerry Goldsmith, Maurice Jarre, Elmer Bernstein, and many others began to incorporate elec-

tronic sounds into their scores, or even compose scores that were completely electronic. Goldsmith's score to *Hoosiers* and Jarre's score to *Witness* are but two examples of traditionally-trained, established Hollywood composers writing scores that used electronic instruments exclusively. Younger composers like James Horner, Basil Poledouris, and Alan Silvestri began to incorporate synthesizer sounds in scores like *Field of Dreams*, *Conan the Barbarian*, and *Romancing the Stone.* Of course, some of this was necessary as producers were requesting it, but composers found that electronic instruments could aid them in creating new textures.

The swiftness of the rise of this technology was awesome. In a few short years the industry went from having access to only the most primitive electronic sound generators to having extremely sophisticated digital equipment at its fingertips. One downside of this was that for a period of time, many string, brass, and wind players faced a shortage of work. Although there were still many orchestral sessions in L.A. during this time, there were less than before because synthesizers were taking the place of the live musicians. In addition, many TV producers, influenced by the success of the score to *Miami Vice*, also switched to completely or partially using synthesizers. The whole world of commercial music was shaken up and altered forever by the arrival of synthesizers and computers.

One of the consequences of this new medium was that because of the expertise needed to master the ever-expanding synthesizer and MIDI technology, an entirely new niche and a new kind of film composer was born: the specialist in electronic, synthesizer scores. These composers became experts in synthesizer sounds, sampling, MIDI technology and sequencing (the technique of using computers instead of analog tape to record the synthesizers or samplers). German born Hans Zimmer was one of the first to establish himself in this field, and has had many successful scores using either entirely electronically generated music or a combination of electronic and acoustical sounds. His scores to *Rain Man, Driving Miss Daisy, The Lion King*, and *Beyond Rangoon* are just some examples of his work. Zimmer and his team have been on the cutting edge of developing new technology and creating new sounds with samplers and digital synthesizers.

Because of the affordability and relative ease of use of MIDI equipment, many young composers today are writing quality electronic scores for features, television, cable, and documentaries. This technology has become a necessary skill for film composers.

Even though the synthesizer craze hit hard and made a deep impact—not only on the sound and texture of film scores, but on the recording industry in general—the pendulum always swings back, as we have seen with other styles. In this case, after the initial rush to use electronic instruments a la Vangelis, many directors and producers began to recognize the cold and sometimes false sounding nature of these instruments. It was one thing to use synthesizers or samplers to create a new and unusual texture, or combine them with orchestral instruments, but the scores that used them to replace orchestral instruments tended to sound dry and phony. For example, if a string section or cello solo is playing beneath an action scene or under dialogue, then a really good sample can sometimes fool the audience. But if the same music is in an exposed place where there is little in the soundtrack to compete with it, even an inexperienced listener can often hear that it is electronically generated and not real.

The result of this was that composers began to use electronic instruments more as an adjunct to an orchestra, unless the director specified an electronic score. (Here, I am speaking of feature films. For television, cable, and low-budget films, often the film's music budget would not allow the use of an orchestra, and electronic instruments became a necessity.) In addition, many synthesizer specialists, such as Hans Zimmer, began to write scores that incorporated full orchestras. A middle ground was found, and it continues to this day as producers, directors, and composers continue to strive for appropriate uses of electronic sounds.

Pop Sounds, Jazz, and Rock 'n Roll Composers

For many reasons, the language of rock and pop music has found its way into film scores in general. As we have seen, every style of film music has reflected to some degree the film-going audience. For

example, in the '30s and '40s the audience understood 19th-century romanticism, and in the '50s and '60s they resonated with jazz-oriented scores. Today, the range of possibilities is the largest it has ever been.

As pop, rock, and jazz styles became more mainstream through the 1970s, their use in films grew. The influences that rock music brings to the world of film scoring are basically threefold: one, rock rhythms and grooves; two, a certain harmonic vocabulary spanning the traditional blues to progressive pop-, rock-, and jazz-influenced songwriting; and three, pop/rock melodic ideas.

Rock rhythms are the easiest to identify when they are used in film scores. This could be a traditional rhythm section of guitar, keyboard, bass, and drums; a hybrid combination of those instruments; or "world" music beats giving a hipper sound to the score. These kinds of sounds have been used in countless scores. In the 1980s, Hans Zimmer used a "world beat" kind of percussion groove in *Rain Man*, Craig Safan used a hip-hop groove for *Stand and Deliver*, and Alan Silvestri used synthesized drums in a quasi-Latin disco beat for *Romancing the Stone*. In the 1990s, Michael Kamen has used rock grooves in the *Lethal Weapon* series and *The Last Boy Scout*.

Many of the harmonic and melodic ideas used by film composers today draw upon pop melodic and harmonic ideas. This can be heard in the scores of those coming from the record industry as well as those coming from the conservatories. Anyone going into film music today knows that there is a fusion between orchestral styles and pop music. James Horner studied at the Royal Academy of Music in London, and Michael Kamen studied at Juilliard, but they can write a pop hit as well as a traditional sounding score. And this is no different from composers of the previous generation like Henry Mancini who did the same thing.

The one difference that exists today is that a composer can be a success in the film industry, and write orchestral scores without any, or minimal knowledge of the orchestra. This can happen because of two factors: one, orchestrators who assist and prepare a full score from a sketch or a tape, and two, the ease of using synthesizers and MIDI

technology. Therefore, a talented rock or jazz musician who has some great creative ideas can realize a score that is beyond the scope of his actual orchestral ability.

In order to understand this trend fully, we must go back a few years. In the 1970s and 1980s yet another wrinkle was added to the film scoring community: the desire by some producers and directors to use well-known rock and jazz musicians to create a score for their films. In retrospect, the validity of this idea can be seen, but it seems to have had mixed success.

The impact of the popular music of the 1960s and 1970s cannot be underestimated. No other generation bought as many records, went to as many concerts, or looked to rock musicians for philosophical, political, and social leadership as did the Baby Boomers coming of age in the '60s and '70s. So it was logical that by the late '70s, the same Baby Boomers who were producing and directing films wanted to use the musicians they considered to be icons. The thinking was that these musicians would speak to the audience through the soundtrack as they did in concert or on records. This was a good idea in theory, but in practice it was dangerous for several reasons.

First, a film score requires the ability to create a musical structure that tells a story and remains harmonically and melodically interesting for about two hours. The average pop song is three or four minutes, and many of these artists do not have the expertise needed to sustain and develop their ideas in the way a film demands. Second, film scores need to have a well thought-out texture of sounds, and the experienced composer will draw upon a wide variety of instrumental possibilities. Most rock and jazz stars, although fine players in their own medium, are only able to execute a much narrower range of sounds and styles. If a film calls for this kind of narrow range, then a rock or jazz artist might be an appropriate choice. Finally, the successful film score comes from a composer knowing that he is a partner to the drama. There is a sensitivity that develops from working with many different pictures and different styles of music. The rock or jazz

composer who only knows concert performance and CD recording is at a severe disadvantage when attempting to work in the unfamiliar medium of film.

This is not to say that there cannot be a successful rock or jazz score. It can and has happened. Eric Clapton has made fine contributions to the *Lethal Weapon* series. Ry Cooder has written some interesting scores including *Paris, Texas.* Jazz trumpet player Terence Blanchard has become a proficient composer and orchestrator.

One rock musician composer that has consistently stood out from the rest is Danny Elfman. Formerly with the L.A. band, Oingo Boingo, he began scoring films for director Tim Burton in the late 1980s. With *Pee Wee's Great Adventure, Batman*, and *The Nightmare Before Christmas*, Elfman established himself as someone very creative with melodies and sound textures, who caught the imagination of many. He showed a great ability to capture the mood of the different kinds of films he wrote for and has established a cult-like following amongst musicians and non-musicians alike.

There are many composers coming up in the ranks of pop and rock music that do not orchestrate, and occasionally there are stories of those who cannot even read music. This is a far cry from the Korngolds and Steiners, but it is the state of the industry today. But if a musician can create the right mood, and with the right musical support can appropriately heighten the drama of a film, is it a bad thing that they know nothing about an orchestra? This is an open-ended question that has proponents on both sides.

In addition to the many rock musicians who have limited orchestral skills, there are still those who have training in orchestration and composing. Today's film music is richer than ever. Part of this richness is due to rock and jazz composers who bring their own special kind of sound. Another aspect is the range of possibilities afforded from traditional symphony orchestras to electronic scores, and hybrids and fusions of the two. Today's composer can work in just about any sound medium he wants that will accomplish the director's vision of the film.

Production

CHAPTER 7

The Film-Making Process

That's the fun part about movie collaboration. You work intensely with a lot of people who are different from you and you learn a lot from them.
—Oliver Stone[1]

The making of a major motion picture is an incredibly complex, costly, creative, and challenging endeavor. It requires people with all kinds of skills. One look at the credits of a film gives an idea of the wide range of expertise needed to pull it off: writers, painters, truck drivers, electricians, carpenters, cameramen, directors, musicians, special-effects designers and technicians, make-up artists, costume designers, publicists, directors' assistants, production assistants, assistants to the assistants, and on and on the credits roll while the music plays. The beauty of a production is that these seemingly disparate groups of people are all working in an organized way to achieve a common goal: the release of the film.

What the average filmgoer may not realize is that many of these groups operate separately, yet parallel to the whole operation. For example, principle photography (the shooting of the film) might be finishing up on location in New Mexico and at a studio in Los Angeles, while a team of special-effects wizards is beginning to work their computer magic in Northern California, the sound-effects people are working at yet another studio in L.A., and the lonely composer is sitting in his studio behind his home in Beverly Hills staring at the swimming pool waiting for the final version of the film.

Actually, this is both far from the truth and close to the truth. Hopefully, nobody will be wasting their time waiting for a film to be completed before they start writing the music because so many films take longer than originally planned. But the reality of the film-making

process is that the *music is the very last thing to be done.* The reason for this is that in order to sync up the music to the action, the composer must wait for the final version, or *locked picture,* also known as a *fine cut.* Before getting into what the composer does, though, let's take a look at the film-making process itself.

Decision Makers

There are several people involved in getting a film off the ground: the producer, director, writer, and possibly the talent (actors). These are the people whose creative, financial, and organizational skills actually drive the production.

The *producer* oversees the financial and organizational aspects of the film. This person supervises the hiring of everyone from director and actors to carpenters and electricians. He makes sure there is a workable schedule and ensures that all elements of the production are running smoothly, from the writing of the script to the feeding of the crew. The producer is responsible for the financial bottom line, and answers to the executives at the movie studio that will release the film.

Producer Darryl Zanuck:

> *People outside of Hollywood and New York don't really have a clear idea of what a producer is or what he does.... Most people think a producer is the person who puts up the money, which is wrong. If you're smart, you never put up the money yourself!*[2]

Even without putting up his own money, the responsibility for a producer can be enormous, as budgets for feature films climb higher and higher. To paraphrase one producer, a movie can be made for $50 million dollars and last one or two weeks in the theaters. But a huge skyscraper can be bought for the same amount of money and stand for decades. However, the producer does much more than just raise money. He is the one who must shepherd a project through the maze of production. This involves coordinating all the creative people, the technicians, the marketing experts, and the financial overseers.

Zanuck again:

> *Even with the right people, this isn't the furniture business or the car business. You have a lot of personalities and a lot of egos, so there are many factors at play.*
>
> *It's easy to go astray and very tough to carry the vision through completely every inch of the way, to make it all work. There's economic pressures, there's time pressures, and there are always personality conflicts when you put so many people together. Everyone works for the common cause, but it is an ego-driven business, and there's a lot of pushing and shoving going on.*[3]

The organization of the team is one of the producer's main jobs, and the three main components of that team are the writer, the director, and the actors. However, it is the director who is the most important day-to-day member of the team. Once the shooting begins, the producer often keeps his distance and lets the director achieve his vision for the film.

The *director* is the creative captain of the project. He has the overall vision for what the film will say and look like. He must also be able to communicate that vision to everyone working on the project and be strong enough to hold to that vision as the film makes its journey from script to silver screen. That means coordinating the creative efforts of many people. Director Ron Howard puts it this way:

> *The buck does stop with the director, but there are so many others involved. I think that the sooner we all see the same movie in our heads, the sooner the collaborative process works and the film benefits from the valuable ideas coming from all those different areas of expertise.*[4]

The director approves the script (sometimes writing it himself), and oversees all the design elements of the film including the cinematography (the camera angles, lighting, and overall "look of the film"), costumes, sets, props, hair, and make-up. The director is responsible for "directing" the actors on the set, deciding when a take is the right

one, which scenes will be shot in which order, and keeping to the overall shooting schedule and budget. The director oversees the editing of the film after shooting is completed, and presents his version to the producer and studio executives for their approval. Except in the rare case of a director like Steven Spielberg or James Cameron, these higher-ups—the execs and producer—have the right to alter the film in any way they see fit. The director is often powerless to control the final version even though it represents months or even years of work.

The *writer*, or *scriptwriter,* takes a story, an idea, a book or a play and makes it into a *screenplay*, or *script*. This person is responsible for creating a script that fits the director's and producer's desires for the film. This can mean that even if the writer is initially happy with a script, it might not be "finished" because of rewrites requested by the director or producer. The final version of the script that is used in the actual shooting of the film is called the *shooting script*.

The writer is responsible for creating an engaging story, making the characters believable, and writing dialogue that fits the characters and the tone of the film. Every line the actors speak, every scene, every part of the plot is considered and mulled over to make sure it is "just right." The screenplay then becomes a blueprint for the shooting of the film. Many people, including the director, producer, cinematographer, film editor, and the actors can have input on the script, both during the writing stage and during the shooting stage. This input can often make it even better as the collaborative process works its magic.

Sometimes several writers work on a film because a single author can't achieve the vision of the director or producer. On many films, "script doctors" are brought in to polish up either the whole thing, certain scenes, or lines of dialogue. Even with only one writer, a screenplay will go through many revisions before a final version, or shooting script, is ready. This process can take as short as a few weeks, or last as long as several years.

Putting It All Together

How does a film make its way from an idea in someone's head, a book, or a play to a multimillion-dollar production showing in your local theater? Depending on who comes up with the original idea for the movie, the process can unfold in different ways, and the people described above come on board in a different order. There are three basic stages of this process: (1) getting the idea for the film, (2) obtaining financing, and (3) hiring the creative and organizational people to make the idea a reality. Often the process is from the top down; the producer gets an idea, receives a screenplay, or buys the rights to a book and then oversees the process from start to finish. However, there are many different ways the process can happen. Here are two possible alternatives to the scenario where the idea for the film originates with the producer:

> *Scenario #1:* A director has an idea for a film, goes to a producer, and pitches a *treatment* (a short synopsis of the plot) to a producer. The producer agrees to undertake the project and begins arranging for financing. He hires a writer, usually with the director's approval. When the script is finished, the producer and director begin to contact actors for the lead roles. Important production roles, such as the cinematographer, film editor, and casting director are hired at this time. When the script nears completion, a production schedule is created and the rest of the crew is hired.

> *Scenario #2:* An accomplished writer brings the first draft of a screenplay to a well-known director with whom he has an established relationship. The director loves the screenplay and agrees to direct it. The story calls for a strong action-hero type, so together they approach a well-known actor who also loves the idea. Next, this trio of proven professionals—writer, director, and movie star—presents a "package" to a producer. The packaged combination of talent, box-office draw, and exciting story line make the project irresistible, and the producer signs on quickly before they pitch the project elsewhere.

There can be many variations of this process, depending on who has the original idea and who that person's contacts might be. Many times an agent will get involved trying to package together two or more elements: writer and director, actor and director, producer, actor, and writer, etc. In the end, the process can be very political, with who-knows-whom being a big part of it. Sometimes it simply comes down to a matter of availability—an actor or director is just not available at the time this production would require him. And sometimes a project is pushed through by the sheer will of one of the parties involved because they believe in it. This is how the 1998 movie *The Apostle* got made. This film features Robert Duvall as actor, director, producer, and major financial backer. He invested several million of his own dollars because it was a project he believed in, and he wanted to see it get made. This is an example of one person performing several roles, putting his creative stamp on different aspects of the project. But whether it is one person filling multiple roles or many people dividing the roles, the making of a film is a huge, complicated, and enormously exciting process.

The Stages of a Film's Production

There are three stages of a film's production: *preproduction*, *production*, and *post-production*. Post-production can be divided into two parts: (1) editing and assembling the film, and (2) music, sound effects, and dubbing. Keep in mind that this business is a flexible one. Things are always changing and can happen in a different way or in a different order from what was originally projected. But these three main chronological divisions basically stay the same.

Preproduction is largely the process described in the previous section—the inception, planning, and development of an idea so that it can become an actual film.

Preproduction involves:

- Conceiving the initial idea, or
- Obtaining the rights to a book, play or short story
- Writing the treatment
- Obtaining financing
- Writing the screenplay
- Hiring the principle creative people
- Casting (hiring the actors)
- Scheduling
- Scouting for locations (out-of-studio shooting)
- Hiring the crew

Production is the actual shooting of the movie. This can take weeks or months depending on the scale of the production. It is an exciting time when all the planning starts to become a physical reality. It is also a time when people are under a lot of pressure to meet deadlines, which can sometimes be affected by such diverse circumstances as the weather on the location, an actor's illness, or even a union work-stoppage. Production involves:

- Rehearsing the actors
- Shooting the film, either at the studio or on location
- Screening dailies (the scenes shot earlier that day, or the previous day)
- Special-effects photography/animation (continues into post-production)
- Film editors beginning review of footage and sometimes starting to assemble the film
- Dialogue soundtrack construction, sometimes including ADR (Automatic Dialogue Replacement, explained later in this chapter)

Post-production can be divided into two large segments: editing and assembling the film, and creating the audio tracks consisting of dialogue, sound effects, and music. These tasks take place simultaneously for the first part of post-production; at this time the dialogue, sound

effects, and music crews begin their work. However, it is not until the second part of the post-production process, after the editing is complete, that the real intensive production of the music, dialogue, and sound effects begins. This is because the film must be completed in order to synchronize these elements properly. (Note: A film is considered *locked* when the director and the producer have "signed off" on an edited version of the film and consider it completed.)

Digital technology is changing these distinctions. One may now edit the picture, music, sound effects, dialogue, and even visual special-effects at the click of a mouse. Before these computer systems were available, changes in the picture needed to be cut and spliced on a work print of the film; music recording tape had to be cut and spliced; sound-effects could not be edited so easily; and visual special-effects were primitive, if existent at all. Now, with powerful software, even after the film is supposedly "locked" and approved by the studio, the director can easily make minor or even major changes. This has led to many situations where the music is being recorded and the director "remembers" that he took out a few seconds of film and forgot to tell the composer. This creates havoc in the synchronization of music to picture. Unfortunately for composers, this is the way of the film-making world as we enter the 21st century.

Post-Production: Stage 1

Editing is when all the footage from production is assembled into a coherent film. This is done by the *film editor*. Often a director shoots several takes of the same scene, with different camera angles, that need to be put together in a natural way. This means matching shots, facial expressions, body language, and dialogue. Once the actual photography, or shooting, is completed, the film editor sifts through hours of footage and makes sure the story is being told in a coherent way, that there is no extraneous material, and that the cuts all make sense visually. It is a crucial task, because this process determines the overall pacing and dramatic impact of the film.

The editorial phase of post-production includes:

- Assembling the rough cut (the working version of the film). The rough cut eventually becomes a fine cut, or locked picture.
- Music temp track
- Screening for studio execs
- Test screenings
- ADR

From the earliest days of film until the early 1990s, editing a film involved running a work print of the film through a projector over and over again. This projector is known as a Moviola, or flat-bed projector. Using foot-pedals, it allows the editor to go back and forth over a print of the film while synchronized with the dialogue track. The editor then decides where to make the edits, physically cuts pieces of film, and splices them together—hence the expression that a scene or line of dialogue ended up "on the cutting room floor." Once this work print is approved by the director, producer, and studio, a negative is cut and spliced in the exact same way. That negative is sent to the lab and copies are made for the theaters.

The method of film editing that uses Moviolas is rapidly becoming extinct. In today's world of computer technology, almost all editing is done digitally on sophisticated systems such as the Avid. All the various takes are loaded into the computer, and the editor then cuts and pastes as he wishes. This also allows the director to easily view several options of a scene. After the editing is completed and the film is approved, a negative must still be physically edited to go to the lab.

Once the film is edited, it enters the stage involving the composer and the rest of the music crew, as well as the sound-effects crew. The composer does not begin writing music cues until there is a locked picture; changes in the picture would affect the planning and synchronization of the music. The exception to this is if songs are involved to which the actors sing or dance on-screen. Then, the music is usually recorded

before shooting begins (prerecorded) so that the final version of the song or arrangement can be played back on the set. In addition to music, post-production is when sound effects are finalized and added.

Post-production involves:

Music
- Locked picture to composer
- Spotting session
- Timing notes created
- Music composition
- Orchestrations
- Copying parts
- Song clearances
- Recording of music
- Mixing music

Non-Music
- Sound effects created
- Foley
- ADR completed
- Special effects completed
- Dubbing
- Answer print (preparation of physical film negative)
- Distribution of film to theaters

Most of the technical terms listed above are explained in subsequent chapters of this book. However, some of these activities require a brief explanation here:

Foley is a process that creates sound effects through live recording. This can be as primitive as simulating horses hooves by clapping two coconut halves together, as in the old radio days, or it can be something like breaking windows or other glass to create the sound of a crash. There are many libraries of sound effects available today on CD, but often the sound-effects crew has a certain effect in mind that the CDs don't contain, so they must create it.

ADR, or Automatic Dialogue Replacement, is when the actors go into a studio to redo any lines that were not recorded well or have extraneous noise on the production track. Often, the dialogue that is recorded on the set of a film is muddy, unclear, or tainted by unwanted sounds on the set. This is especially common with shooting on outdoor sets or location, when it is impossible to control noise such as airplanes, lawn mowers, sirens, and other sounds of modern life. In addition, the actor may have garbled the line, the boom operator may not have gotten a good angle, or if wearing a body mike, the actor may have brushed it against an article of clothing. In ADR, the actors go into a studio, listen to and watch their original performance, and redo the line or lines until they are synced up exactly. This is quite common, and is an important part of the audio element of post-production.

The audio tracks are the very last element in the film's production. Once the music, sound effects, and dialogue have been added (the dubbing session), the film is ready to be printed, copied, and duplicated for release. The director sends the negative with the sound tracks to a lab that creates a copy of the film called an *answer print.* The director views this copy and ensures that all the colors were mixed properly at the lab, and that the look of the film is correct. Sometimes this is a one-step process; sometimes the director returns to the lab several times to get it right. Once the answer print is approved, it is ready for distribution.

This is a generalized overview of the film-making process. There are many other tasks that must be accomplished, ranging from financial accounting to building sets to feeding the crew—the list could go on and on.

One thing that cannot be emphasized enough is the pressure that can be placed on the composer because of the fact that he must wait for just about everything else to be finished before starting to write. Films are often behind schedule in production, but the release date cannot change; the composer may have less time to complete the score than originally scheduled. Remember our lonely composer sitting by the pool, waiting for a locked picture? Here is a story about post-production schedules:

Michael Kamen was the composer for the Kevin Costner film, *Robin Hood, Prince of Thieves*—a big-budget production of about $40 to $50 million. A huge amount of money had been spent for advertising, and by early spring, trailers, billboards, and buses around the country were announcing a June 6 release date.

Michael expected to receive the locked picture in March. However, production and editing got way behind schedule, and he did not receive the locked picture until the first week of April. This gave him only six

weeks to write *and* record about 120 minutes of music for a 104 piece orchestra. (The last two weeks of May were given over to dubbing, color correction, duplication, and shipping of the film to the theaters.)

Now fortunately Michael was smart, and started working on his thematic material while he was waiting for the final cut, though he couldn't do any actual music cues. He remembered a ballet score he had written years before, and extracted a beautiful theme that became the love theme for the film, as well as the melody for the Bryan Adams song "Everything I Do, I Do It For You." He also worked on some of the action themes, preparing those for the time when he could synchronize them to the locked picture. When the locked picture finally arrived, he was ready and could work quickly and efficiently.

The stages of film production outlined here are not set in stone; this whole process involves a great deal of flexibility. For example, editing could begin during production. If enough footage for the beginning of the film has been shot, while the director is off shooting the ending of the picture, the film editor might assemble the first few minutes. Or parts of the script might be reworked even while the movie is being shot. The process is fluid, and the successful people are those who learn to honor that fluidity, and even harness it to improve the project.

CHAPTER 8

The Composer's Time Frame

Unfortunately, filming is all against the clock ...
it's a constant battle between commerce and creativity.
—Ridley Scott[1]

The amount of time a composer gets to score a film can vary widely. In the previous anecdote there was only six weeks for an enormous amount of music, and although this sounds like an outrageously short amount of time, it is not all that unusual. Anything can happen during production that can cause the late delivery of a film; an actor gets ill and delays shooting, the weather on location won't cooperate, the director decides to make some changes, the studio doesn't like the ending and it has to be reshot. All a composer can do is go with it. Or, if the contract allows, refuse to take on the project if it is delivered later than a certain date.

A typical feature film will have from about 30 minutes of music to over 120 minutes. Each individual piece of music is called a *cue*. Each *cue* can be as short as just a few seconds, or as long as several minutes. A *cue* can be played by an orchestra, or it can be a song coming from a radio on-screen. Every new piece of music, regardless of its origin, is still called a *cue*.

The collection of cues making up all the music in the film is called the *score*. So if someone says, "I liked the *score* to that picture," they are referring to the music from beginning to end. If they say, "I really like that *cue*," they are talking about one isolated piece of music, often for a specific scene.

There is no rule of thumb as to how many minutes of music can be written in a certain amount of time. John Williams has said that he considers a good day to be two minutes of music composed. This

means that in order to complete a *Star Wars* or *Indiana Jones* type of action film, with an average of 80 or 90 minutes of music, he needs about eight weeks to complete the writing. (Five-day-a-week schedules are often a luxury for composers; they are much more likely to go six or seven days a week for a few weeks and then take some time off.) A one-hour dramatic TV show such as *X-Files* can require as much as thirty or more minutes to be composed *and* recorded in one week. In addition, whether the music is for full orchestra or sequenced often determines the pace of writing and recording. Every composer has his own speed.

In most cases, the composer's first real involvement with the film is in post-production, after the film is locked. This is when the real composing begins. However, depending on what stage the film was in when he was hired, the composer might have had an earlier involvement. For example, if a certain composer is being considered during preproduction, the director might ask him to read the script and then informally discuss his ideas for the film. Some composers like to see the script in advance, for they like to start thinking about musical possibilities early in the process. Others prefer to wait until the picture is locked, or at least close to completed, because so much of what is composed is suggested by the actual visual images and pacing of the film.

There are also times when a director asks a composer to come to the set and observe the shooting of the film. As with reading the script, some composers are happy to participate in this early stage of making the film, but most prefer to wait until the film is completed before getting involved. This is because the shooting of a picture is a slow, painstaking, and sometimes tedious process where an enormous amount of imagination is required to envision the final product.

There are some instances when the composer gets involved with the film during preproduction or production. This is necessary when the film is a musical where characters sing on-screen *(Yentl, Mary Poppins*, etc.), or when the film contains scenes where the actors are dancing to live musicians or dancing to a song on the soundtrack. When any of these events are happening, the music must be planned in advance. The tempo must be chosen, and the music is prerecorded so that it can be played back on the set. If there are live musicians on-camera (called *sideline musicians*), they must be coordinated to appear to be playing. In modern film making, it is often the *music supervisor* who oversees this process.

The Spotting Session

In most cases, for a dramatic, or non-musical film, the composer's active involvement begins with post-production. First, he receives a locked version of the film. Very soon after receiving this tape, the composer attends the *spotting session*—the meeting between producer, director and composer where they decide how to use music in the film. The major decisions in this meeting are: where the music will begin and end for each cue, what it should sound like, and what role it will play in relation to the drama. Most composers like to view the film before going to the spotting session; it gives them a chance to think about it and get familiar with the film before discussing it with the director.

After the spotting session, the composer is really ready to get to work. The music editor prepares timing notes and the other technical aspects of synchronizing the music to the picture so that the composer can begin writing the music. The composer is acutely aware of the project's deadlines—most importantly, the delivery date for the music, the air date if it is for television, and the release date for a theatrical opening if it is a film. Many events are set in motion once the composer gets working on the film and has these deadlines. This includes hiring the orchestrators, studio musicians, booking the studio, etc. The composer must put himself on a disciplined timeline, or writing schedule, in order to make these deadlines. There can be as many as forty or fifty separate cues in a film, so there is a lot of music to keep track of. In order to complete this kind of output on time, the composer must write a certain amount per day.

The reality of this kind of schedule and the nature of the process of writing music combines to make this a solitary time for the composer despite all the necessary interaction with other members of the production team. Many hours a day must be set aside for writing, and this is something only the composer can accomplish. Through the years, film composers have commented on the lonely nature of their job, for once

a project is begun they can be like hermits locked away in their studios for days at a time. However, it is a rewarding job and only this part of it is lonely. Another large aspect of the composer's job is interacting with interesting creative people—musicians, directors, writers, and others.

Different Working Styles

Every composer has a slightly different approach to the process of writing a film score. But there are two distinct styles that, for the purposes of this book, I will call the *traditional approach* and the *non-traditional approach*. In the traditional approach, after the composer spots the film, the music editor makes detailed timing notes. The composer then writes the music, usually with pencil and paper, ultimately generating a sketch that is sent to an orchestrator.

In the non-traditional approach, after the spotting session, the composer knows where each cue begins and ends, but often will not have any timing notes at all. That is because this composer plans to sequence his ideas by playing along with the film. In this method, often a team of people assists the composer. In addition to the music editor, there will be a recording engineer and sometimes a synthesizer expert. If a live orchestra is used, then eventually the sequenced music is sent to an orchestrator, who will create a written score.

Both methods are valid and used in Hollywood today. Some composers use one method exclusively, some use both, depending on the project. The non-traditional method is faster, and often must be used when the schedule is really tight.

An Ideal Schedule

For the purposes of this book, here is a generalized and ideal schedule from the time the composer receives a locked picture to the release of the film. Let's say that this film has 45 minutes of music, and the composer is using the "traditional" method:

Week 1
Composer receives the locked picture. Reviews tape at home. Spotting session with director, producer and music editor. Music editor begins preparing timing notes.

Weeks 2 to 5
Writing begins. Composer gives sketches to orchestrator. Orchestrations go to copyist as they are completed. Music editor finishes timing notes and prepares for synchronization.

Week 6
Recording the music: three to four days, six hours per day of recording. Approximately 18 minutes recorded each day. Mixing the music: two to three full days.

Weeks 7 to 8
Dubbing music with sound effects and dialogue.

Week 9
Film goes to lab for answer prints and color correction.

Week 12
Film delivered to theaters.

As with almost anything in this business, this timeline can morph in different directions. It can get shorter if there are delays in production or picture-editing, or there can even be the luxury of more time if things go smoothly during production, or if the release date gets pushed forward.

Mock-ups

As I have mentioned, there can be an enormous amount of pressure on the composer. There is also the added dimension of the pressure that comes from needing to please the director and producer. For this reason, in the age of MIDI, a composer often plays a sequenced *mock-up* of a cue for the powers-that-be. This is a rough version of the cue recorded with synthesizers and samplers to produce the sounds that eventually will be a real orchestra (unless it is an electronic or synthesizer score, in which case this version will not be so far from the final music). This is a dual-edged sword. On the one hand, it can give the director a good idea of where the composer is going with the cue, and

the composer can be assured that the director's vision is being accomplished. The director can offer suggestions and comments, feel involved in the music process, and leave the composer's studio feeling secure that the music is going in the right direction. On the other hand, it can be very uncomfortable to have the director literally standing over one's shoulder making musical suggestions. In addition, on this rough version of the cue, the director might hear only the electronic-sounding synth strings and not-quite-real sounding French horn sample and think it is terrible, not having the musical ability to make the imaginary transfer to real instruments. Because he then focuses on the fake-sounding instruments instead of the actual musical ideas, he can mistakenly think that the cue itself doesn't work when all that is wrong is the use of electronic instruments substituting for real ones. It then becomes the composer's job to explain, or even "pitch" the music he conceived, and convince the director that it will work. Or he must change the cue and go in a different direction in order to please the director. Clear communication, and the ability to listen to a director and incorporate his ideas, is necessary.

Mark Isham illustrates this process, and discusses his experience in showing the director and producers the first version of the musical cues he wrote—the synthesized mock-up—for the movie, *Nell*, starring Jodie Foster:

> *As I remember, I wrote a whole bunch of music, and Michael Apted, the director, Jodie Foster, the star and co-producer, and Renée Missel, the other co-producer, were the team that would work with me. They came over to my studio and heard the first version. And they hated it! I honestly don't remember what it was about the first pass, except that I don't think it was mysterious enough. The thing I remember having to get— and it seems sort of obvious now because it really did help to align the movie a lot once I got it—was the sense of mystery. Where? How? Why? Who is this person? What could possibly have transpired to create a life for her like this?*

> *Now Jodie Foster is one of the smartest people I've ever met in my whole life. And part of what makes her so smart is that she is really a good communicator. And Michael Apted is such an elegant gentleman. So in a meeting like that where they say, "We don't like it," it's never a feeling that you've been dealt this crushing blow and that you'll never rise up again. They don't scream and yell, "This is shit! How could you...!" It's not that at all. They have good reasons for why they don't feel it, and suggestions for where they would like it to go.*

The balancing act a composer often performs is to write something that he is happy with, that fits the film, and satisfies the director's desires. Sometimes the composer disagrees with the director. Then it becomes a matter of discrimination whether or not to speak up and argue, or go with what is asked for. This will depend on several factors, including the composer's personal relationship with the director, the composer's track record and "clout," and sometimes how badly the composer wants to keep the job.

Alan Silvestri did the music for the 1998 film, *Practical Magic*, starring Sandra Bullock and Nicole Kidman, in just three weeks. He had to rely on experience and instinct in order to accomplish the task:

> *They [the production team] had a bit of a meltdown and they got in some trouble, scheduling-wise. I had to think long and deep about whether I was going to do this movie. I finally decided that if they could give me the time I felt I needed to accomplish a score, I would do it. It was about 60 minutes of music. I wrote it in 12 days, and recorded the entire score in three days of recording. They were dubbing, transferring, mixing, and printing the films while we were on the scoring stage. It was the deepest schedule hole I've ever seen. There may be projects that have been crazier, but for me, writing the entire score in 12 days, and recording it in three—those were consecutive days—and then the movie was out the following weekend ... that was really crazy.*

Although the entire process described in this section is based on the scoring of a full-length, large-budget feature film, the same principles apply to television shows and movies, cable and low-budget films, documentaries, and even student films. The composer does not begin writing until the editing of the movie is complete. There is then a spotting session and the use of music will be determined. (Note that in a TV series, also called *episodic television*, the director is often not involved in the spotting. This is because in TV, once shooting is complete, the director's job is finished. The producer then guides the rest of post-production.) There are still deadlines to make and the film makers still must be pleased with the final product. The scale is different, but the concept remains the same. It is still a collaborative effort. Clear communication and good listening skills are always necessary. Proper organization of one's time is crucial in order to meet deadlines. Time frames change, and sometimes the composer feels like he is in the middle of a swirling storm of deadlines and details. But the music must be written, and the deadlines met.

CHAPTER 9

Spotting

What you're trying to do is to catch the spirit of a picture. And that means sometimes you go contrary to what's on the screen, and sometimes you go with what's on the screen. It's a matter of instinct; if your instincts are good, it's going to work for you.
—David Raksin

Of the many elements that go into creating the music for a film, one of the most crucial is spotting. *Spotting* refers to where the music goes and what it will sound like. Frankly, one could have fabulous themes, sparkling orchestration, great players and a terrific creative relationship with the director, but if the music comes in and out at the wrong places, it can ruin a film. If a particular instrument enters in a way that is obtrusive, it can destroy the dramatic impact of a scene. If the overall sound and texture of the music is light and bright, but the film is dark and brooding, clearly that will not work. Psychologically, if the music does not fit like a glove in the way the costumes, lighting, and sets do, the audience gets distracted consciously or subconsciously. Therefore, the music's starts and stops, swells and retreats, and specific instrumentation and textures are carefully crafted to fulfill specific dramatic functions. This cannot be overemphasized. The point of the music is to further the story, to move the drama along, or tell us something about the characters or situation. In order to accomplish this, the music must be placed sensitively. When music is present in the film, it must be there for a reason, or it is probably not necessary.

The beginning composer should understand that effective spotting is a skill that comes with experience, so patience is in order. Many composers just starting out make the familiar mistakes of writing too many cues, over-writing the individual cue (as the Emperor said to Mozart: "Too many notes!"), and starting a cue too strongly (for example, using strings in a thick chord when a gentle unison would be

better). Learning when to bring the music right in on a cut, and when you can be early or late, is a skill that comes with experience. In addition, as a composer becomes more experienced after scoring many different kinds of scenes, his insight becomes more finely tuned to what is on the screen and the intentions of the director. There are some general concepts that can guide this process:

1. *You are a partner in mixed media.* In most cues, music accompanies an actor's lines, creates a bridge from scene to scene, or gently helps to enhance the drama in a subtle way. In these scenes, the music is truly in the background. In a few situations, the music gets to stand out on its own—the action scenes, love scenes, and grand vistas of mountains or oceans. And these scenes also require sensitivity to how the music fits dramatically with what has happened and what is about to happen.

2. *Does there need to be music*? One must be absolutely sure that a given scene needs music. This surety can come in the form of a gut feeling, a plot driven need, or the director's request (whether or not you are in agreement). Points to consider include the dramatic needs, as well as what music has come just before or just after the scene in question.

3. *If there is music, what am I trying to say with it*? Asking this question helps keep the composer focused. It forces him to form an intent that gives an overall guideline for the emotional impact of the music. This goes beyond happy, sad, light, dark, etc. Similar questions are: Am I moving the drama forward? Am I expressing this character's thoughts or feelings appropriately? What instruments will accomplish these goals best?

Remembering these points helps keep the music a carefully considered element of the film, not just a composer's creative whim. If the composer is clear on why the music is there and what it is trying to accomplish, then his job is that much easier. The music then becomes a whole organic piece, not just a series of short musical sequences.

Elmer Bernstein speaks about how he begins conceiving music for a film:

> *I spot a film strictly as a dramatist. I'm not thinking of music at all when I spot a film. I look at a scene and say: Should this scene have music? Why should it have music? If it does have music, what is the music supposed to be doing? That's my process.*

After the picture is locked, the composer meets with the director, music editor, and sometimes the producer and film editor. They review the film and discuss where the music will go, what it should sound like, and which dramatic situations to emphasize (or de-emphasize). This is called a *spotting session*. At this meeting the film is discussed scene by scene to determine the need for music, and to discuss what the music should sound like—what style, instruments, and emotions are musically necessary. The music editor takes notes for the composer regarding specific timings of cues and dramatic hits (see chapter 10). This meeting is the time when different approaches should be discussed, e.g., to play through a certain piece of action, to emphasize it, or to foreshadow an event or not. Keep in mind that most directors have no formal musical background and must speak in layman's terms, not musical terms. He might try to sound informed about many different styles of music when the breadth of his knowledge lies somewhere between the Beatles and Puff Daddy. Or he might have been a classical piano major in college and have thorough knowledge of the classical masters as well as current pop styles. The composer must find a way to understand the director's desire and translate his words into musical ideas.

Alan Silvestri has a wonderful relationship with several directors, and understands the pressure the director can feel, and how that pressure affects his relationship with the composer:

> *You've got to remember what you're doing here. You're working for somebody, and you, the composer, are not going to be the one called on the carpet when the movie was supposed to make $40 million this weekend and it only made $150,000 ... You're probably off on your next movie, but there's somebody out there who's sitting in a chair right now with a bunch of people in suits standing*

around him, and he's having a real bad day. That person's called the director! So if you think for a minute that the director is not going to have a whole lot to say about what kind of music goes into their film and how it sounds, you're kidding yourself.

Spotting is the first step towards completing a successful score. It must be done carefully, sensitively, and with the understanding that the music is a partner with the drama, as the composer is a partner with the director. Sometimes this partnership is smooth with excellent give and take. There can also be considerable friction if the director (or producer) requests a certain style or musical idea that the composer finds objectionable. As mentioned previously, it is in these situations that the composer must decide whether to argue with the director, or to go along with his wishes. (This is often where the "temp track" can be useful. More about this in chapter 10.) Ultimately, the composer's job is twofold in nature: one, he must please those who have hired him, and two, he must do it in such a way that his musical integrity remains intact. Being a film composer involves an enormous amount of flexibility and sensitivity, with a handful of diplomacy thrown in for good measure. One must be a good communicator, and especially have the ability to listen and transfer into musical terms what a director is saying.

When I was scoring the TV series, *Monsters*, each episode had a different director. At one spotting session, the director said he wanted the opening to "float, like the beginning of *Citizen Kane*." Now, anyone who has seen this 1941 movie with that awesome Bernard Herrmann score will remember that the opening music features very low-end woodwinds playing non-functional harmonies. To me, it doesn't float; it actually is very heavy, and I feel "sinks" would be a better term. I had to translate what he was really saying. After looking at the show in question, I realized that the operative description was the director wanting the sound of Herrmann's score in *Citizen Kane*, not to the adjective "float." I wrote something low, dark, and ominous and it was just what he wanted.

Clear communication between composer and director is essential. The director's vision of the film is the most comprehensive, and his abstract ideas for cues may provide keen insight into the type of musical ideas that will make a score succeed. The composer must help these ideas evolve into actual music.

Elmer Bernstein reflects on conceiving the music for *The Rainmaker* as a result of conversations with director Francis Ford Coppola:

> *I have to credit Francis with the bluesy 6/8 idea in a roundabout way. What happened was, when I first got on* The Rainmaker, *Francis wasn't going to have a score as we know a score to be. At first, he was going to go the B.B King route—in other words, real Memphis stuff with some very minor connective things in scoring. But as he began to develop the film itself, he began to feel that he needed to depend more on score. So it was my decision to use the Hammond B3 organ, but it came out of his idea of Memphis ambience. Out of that ambience, I retained the three instruments you hear a great deal of: the Hammond B3, the muted trumpet, and the guitar. But that came out of Francis' original concept.*
>
> *When I came on* Rainmaker *it was in rough-cut form, and the version I finally recorded to was version #26. It went through some amazing changes. The interesting thing about Francis is that each time he changed the film it was for the better. He wasn't just fooling around, he was just "finding" the film, so to speak.*

The most important element of the *spotting session* is clear communication with the director. Once the composer and director share the same vision for the music, then the composer can get to work writing the score. However, there are still many spotting decisions to be made. The music can begin right on a cut, a few seconds before it, or even right after it. It can start immediately after an important line of dialogue, or it can wait and let that line sink in. It can foreshadow a dangerous situation, or play it more neutrally. There are countless spotting decisions to be made that will affect the drama, and the audience's experience of the story. How these decisions are made will be a combination of the composer's experience, his dramatic sensitivity, and the director's wishes.

CHAPTER 10

The Music Editor

Diplomatic skills. You've got a director sitting next to you, you're in a recording booth, the composer's out there, the music is being recorded, and the director says "What the hell is this music that I'm hearing?" Well, what do you say to that? Good luck! You hope that it's a long music cue so it will give you time to think of how to respond.
—Eric Reasoner, Music Editor

The two people assisting the composer on a daily basis are the orchestrator (see chapter 11) and the *music editor*. The music editor is often an under-recognized member of the production team. He must have excellent music skills, thorough knowledge of various advanced software programs (Auricle, Cue, Digital Performer, and Pro Tools are common), and be a cool, calm, and collected diplomat in the service of both the composer and the director. The music editor is responsible for making spotting notes from the spotting session, creating timing notes, and preparing the film or software for synchronization of the music with the final version of the film.

Music editor Eric Reasoner:

> *As a music editor, the more you know about music the better off you are. However, there are still a lot of music editors that have an instinctive sense—not that they studied music, but they really know and have quick instincts about cutting music. They are also good at dealing with pressure and handling a lot of different kinds of individuals, which is a big, big part of it.*

In today's modern world of film making, most of the music editor's tasks are accomplished using computer software. However, there are still some physical tools and pieces of equipment that are used:

A *reel* is the carousel that the film is loaded onto when it goes through the camera during shooting and through a projector. Every reel used during production and post-production contains about 8 to 12 minutes of film, making about 10 to 14 reels for the average movie. However, when a film is delivered to the theater, every two reels are combined so that the theater receives 5 to 7 reels. The projectionist then makes *reel changes* at the appropriate points. At some of the more modern theaters, they can splice and load the film onto one giant reel, called a *platter*, which turns parallel to the floor, making reel changes unnecessary.

Magnetic sound film, also known as *mag film*, is film that is specially coated with a magnetic substance similar to audiotape. This is the kind of film that is used to record and edit sound to sync to picture. Film is used so that the music, dialogue, sound effects, and picture can run on similar machines, and the motors can be easily synchronized. *Mag film* is being used less and less as digital technology replaces it.

The *optical soundtrack* is the stripe on the edges of a finished film that contains the sound for the movie. Until recently, with the arrival of digital technology, this track was read by a light cell that converted the light-sensitive images into sound. Hence, it is called an optical soundtrack. This technology has changed very little from the inception of sound films to the 1990s, and is still used in many theaters today as the digital technology that will replace it is still being implemented. (See Fig. 10.1. 35mm Composite)

SMPTE is the time code that enables different computers, synthesizers, and video machines to talk to each other and synchronize music to video, or music to music. The letters stand for "Society of Motion Picture and Television Engineers," which developed this time code in the sixties.

Temp Tracks

Often, the first real involvement the music editor has in a film is towards the middle of post-production. At this time, as the work-print of the film is solidified, the director asks the music editor to prepare a *temp track*. This is a temporary track of music laid into the work-print

35mm Composite

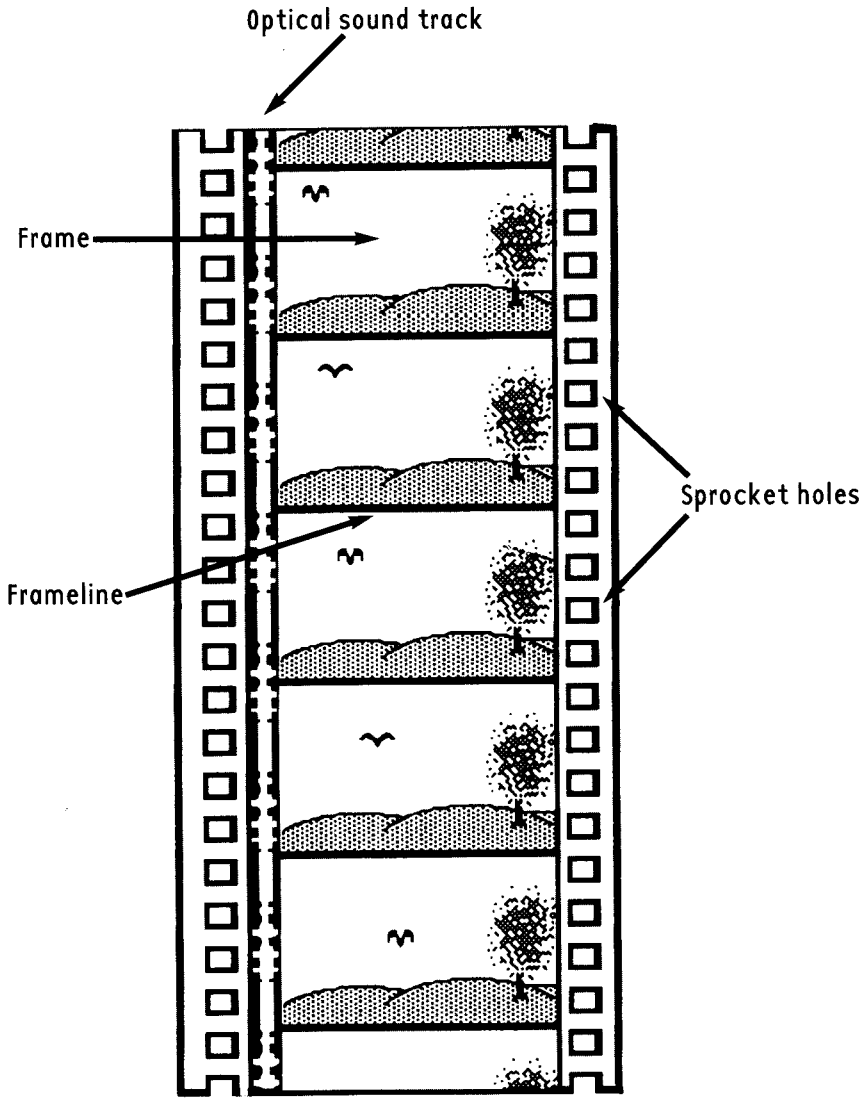

Fig. 10.1. 35mm Composite

of the film in order to give studio executives and test audiences an idea of what the film will be like once the final score is completed. Without any music at all, this work-print can be dry and lifeless, especially in action scenes. So the director gives the music editor some guidelines as to what kind of music to use (if not specific pieces), and the music editor snips and cuts these pieces to fit, not only dramatically, but also rhythmically and harmonically. In the old days, magnetic tape and film had to be spliced in order to accomplish this; today, Pro Tools or other digital audio software is employed. The music for the temp track can come from anywhere—from other soundtracks, from classical, pop, or jazz CDs—anything the music editor can find is fair game. No royalties need to be paid and no sync licenses agreed to because this temporary music will not be used in a version of the film that is shown to the public. It is only used in-house to show the producers, studio executives and test audiences to get their reaction.

Most contemporary films have temp tracks until the final scoring is completed. If one listens closely, often it can be discerned what the temp track was if the composer had to closely imitate it in order to please the director. For example, the temp track for *Titanic* was built from music recorded by the Irish singer Enya. Composer James Horner then had to adapt this kind of flowing, ethereal, New Age style to fit the action. Another good example is the temp track for *Star Wars*. This was Gustav Holst's 1917 classical piece *The Planets*. If the movie is a sequel, it's an easy call. For example, the temp track for *Lethal Weapon IV* was taken from *Lethal Weapon I, II,* and *III*. But no matter what the source of the temp track, music editors must work hard and long to edit a temp track to fit a picture, and they must have command of a huge selection of music from which to choose.

Music editors often use the term *tracking* to describe either the process of creating the temp-track, or to the task of laying-in preexisting music to a finished film. Tracking can refer to the process of creating the temp track for the work print, or to the use of preexisting music in the final version of the film. So, the use of music that is not written by the composer specifically for a scene, where it is taken from another source, is usually called tracking. Eric Reasoner discusses the process of creating temp tracks:

It depends on the relationship between the director, picture editors, and you [the music editor]. You may set up a traditional spotting session where you look at the film and discuss ideas for the temp track. Or you may just screen the film on your own and then converse with the director about styles and things like that, and then just begin searching for music. Sometimes, you have a real wide creative range to pick music that's appropriate, and you can just go your own way.

On The Three Musketeers, *when [music editor] Michael Ryan and I were tracking that film, we had a two or three hour meeting with Steve Herek, the director, where we looked at different parts of the film, talking about style. He had already laid up some music against some scenes as examples, and from that session Michael and I went back to the office and just started searching through tons and tons of existing scores, soundtracks, and CDs, picking out music that fit within those guidelines.*

Spotting Notes

The music editor's next responsibility, after cutting the temp track, is usually to go to the spotting session, take spotting notes, and then prepare the timing notes. *Spotting notes* are a generalized description of where the music begins and ends for each cue. Spotting notes also contain any special instructions discussed between the composer and director for a certain cue like bringing in a theme at a certain point, or hitting a specific piece of action. From the more general spotting notes, the music editor then prepares timing notes, which are very detailed descriptions of each scene with corresponding timings. (See Fig. 10.2. Spotting Notes from *The Simpsons*.)

THE SIMPSONS #5F02 "Treehouse of Horror VIII" · Music Spotting Notes — Page 1

Composer: **Alf Clausen** / Music Editor: **Chris Ledesma** — 9/29/97

CUE #	START	STOP	LENGTH	DESCRIPTION
1M1	01:00:35:17	01:01:04:03	:29	Main Title starts as sword appears; low, change on stabs; play thru title and couch gag to out
1M2	01:01 19:03	01:01:22:14	:03	Open Act 1 - Homega Man - Sci-Fi; tail under Brockman dia
1M3	01:02:12 25	01:02:15:05	:02	Start on cut to military antique store; Homer goes to buy a bomb shelter; tail under next dia.
1M4	01:02:40 11	01:02:44:25	:04	On cut to estab shot of Paris; musette; happy until settle on military compound, then dark on settle; tail under next dia.
1M5	01:02:59 09	01:03:07:28	:09	On cut to Eiffel Tower splitting open; launch missile; ominous and threatening; out on cut to outer space
1M6	01:03:11 08	01:03:23:00	:12	On EOL "What the hell was that?"; through snickering aliens; out on cut to missile headed for earth
1M7	01:03:24:17	01:03:42:10	:18	on cut to missile flying over Springfield; G.P. on comic book guy; resume on POV missile and out on explosion
1M8	01:03:55:14	01:03:59:00	:04	Spooky and creepy on overhead shot of car in traffic; out on cut to back of Homer head leaning out of car
1M9	01:04:20:28	01:04:23:27	03	Sting the push-in on newspaper; out on cut to Homer
1M10	01:04:27:13	01:04:46:21	19	Eerie as Bart ghost appears; thru entire family until Maggie and others are out of frame; then sad as Homer cries; out just before "No, no, no!"
1M11	01:05:02:20	01:05:05:02	02	On cut to estab movie theater: happy Homer; tail on cut to int.
1M12	01:05:23:25	01:05:35:12	12	*SOURCE* -- Homer sings along with a boom box; "War" CD master
1M13	01:05:38:19	01:05:40:10	02	Start on cam settle on mutants; scary/dark; out as Homer shrieks
1M14	01:06:08 19	01:06:28:09	20	As Burns: "And now you must die"; dark and scary; then chase as they run after him; tail on cut to dead chauffeur; thru reveal of coffin and out
1M15	01:06:35 13	01:07:03:13	38	On cut to ext. on car; Car chase; tail on cut to int. house on relieved Homer
1M16	01 07 09 27	01:07:10:14	01	Sting on push-in on mutants: out on cut to reverse angle on Homer
1M17	01 07:22 04	01:07:24:26	03	Start on cut to back of Homer going to hug kids; tail under the mutants: "Awww."
1M18	01:07:56:23	01:08:00:03	03	Sincere Marge as cam pushes in on her during her speech; out to clear "NOW!"

Fig. 10.2. Spotting Notes from The Simpsons. *Used by Permission*

Master Cue List

From these spotting notes the music editor creates a *master cue list*, or *music summary*—a list of all the cues and the corresponding places they appear in the film. Eventually, the composer gives every cue a verbal title, like "Billy Splits Quick," or "The Big Kiss." But at this stage, which is before the composer has begun writing, the music editor assigns every cue an alphanumerical designation, like "4M3," which indicates the reel and its location within that reel. The first number is the reel, "M" stands for music, and the last number is a sequential number indicating where that cue is placed in the reel. In this instance, 4M3 means the 4th reel, music cue number 3. Some reels might have several music cues, some might have none. But if a music editor sees 11M2, he knows that piece of music is the second cue in reel eleven.

Note that in television there are variations of this system. Because the shows are divided into "acts," instead of reels, the first number often corresponds to the act number. (An *act* is each segment of the show, divided by commercials.) So 3M2 means Act 3, music cue number 2. And sometimes, in television, the first number refers to the episode number for that particular season, and the second number is simply where the cue falls in the entire show. For example, 14M7 means the seventh cue in the fourteenth show of the year.

The master cue list shows every cue, assigns it an appropriate number, indicates how long it is, and gives the SMPTE time for when it begins. Cues are also called *starts*, meaning that the orchestra has to start a recording for each cue. It is often said, therefore, that the master cue list shows every start. (See Fig. 10.3. Master Cue Sheet from *The Simpsons*.)

Simpsons 5F02 Mon 10/6/97 2:00 Pm O'Henry

Alf Clausen

				STRINGS			WOODWINDS				BRASS			RHYTHM						
CUE	CLIK	TIME	TITLE	Vns	Vns	Vs	Bs	1	2	3	4	Hrn	Tpt	Tbn	Tbn	Pno	Syn	Harp	Guitar	Drums	Perc	Arr
1m1	9 - 4	00:28	Halloween VIII	10	3	3	1	R	Ob	B♭Cl	CB	2	2	2		Syn	Syn	1	-	-	2	AC
1m2	10 - 1	00:08	The Homega Man	10	3	3	1	AF	Ob	R	R	2	R	-	2	Syn	Syn	1	-	-	1+El	DH
1m3	12 - 5	00:07	The Withstandinator.	10	3	3	1	R	Ob	Cl	Bn	3	2	2		Pno	Syn	1	-	-	2	DH
1m4	9 - 7	00:05	Cordon Bleu	10	3	3	1	R	Ob	BC	CB	3	-	2		Syn	Syn	1	Gtr	1		DH
1m5	16 - 1	00:09	Rocket In The Pocket	10	3	3	1	R	Ob	Cl	CB	3	2	2		Syn	Syn	1	-	-	2	DH
1m6	21 - 0	00:12	Xang & Kang	10	3	3	1	-	Ob	B♭Cl	CB	-	-	-		Syn	Syn	1	-	-	1	AC
1m7	9 - 3	00:18	Missle Whistle	10	3	3	1	R	Ob	Cl	Bn	3	2	2		Pno	Syn	1	-	-	2	DH
1m8	13 - 2	00:08	A Disarming Discourse	10	3	3	1	AF	Ob	R	R	2	-	2		Syn	Syn	1	-	-	1+El	DH
1m9	11 - 0	00:03	Oh, My Dog Sting	10	3	3	1	R	CB	Cl	Bn	3	2	-		Pno	Syn	1	-	-	2	DH
1m10	15 - 2	00:19	Just Cos	10	3	3	1	-	BH	-	-	-	-	-		Syn	Syn	1	-	-	2	AC
1m11	11 - 6	00:07	The Last Man Alive	10	3	3	1	R	Ob	Cl	Bn	3	2	2		Pno	Syn	1	-	-	2	DH
1m13	16 - 6	00:02	A Mutation Sensation	10	-	-	-	-	-	B♭Cl	-	-	-	-		Syn	Syn	1	-	-	1	AC
1m14	10 - 6	00:20	Nuanse Castle	10	3	3	1	R	Ob	Cl	Bn	3	2	2		Syn	Syn	1	-	-	2	DH
1m15	9 - 6	00:28	Cookie And Dagger	10	3	3	1	R	CB	Cl	Bn	3	2	2		Syn	Syn	1	-	-	2	DH
1m16	13 - 4	00:01	Bling Dis' Mutants	10	3	3	-	R	Ob	Cl	Bn	2	2	-		Pno	-	1	-	-	-	DH
1m17	13 - 3	00:08	Bingo A Tear To Your Eye Socket	10	3	3	1	R	Ob	Cl	Bn	3	-	2		Pno	-	1	-	-	1	DH
1m18	18 - 4	00:03	Sharing Their Vision - Not	10	3	3	1	AF	Ob	Cl	Bn	2	-	-		-	-	1	-	-	-	AC
1m19	11 - 3	00:11	That's The Mings I Married	10	3	3	1	R	Ob	Cl	Bn	2	2	2		Pno	Syn	1	-	-	2	DH
1m1	14 - 3	00:06	Pity vs Fly Theme	10	3	3	1	R	Ob	Cl	Bn	3	2	2		Pno	Syn	1	-	-	2	DH
2m3	15-1	00:06	I Must Warn You	10	3	-	-	AF	BH	Cl	-	-	-	-		Syn	Syn	1	-	-	2	DH
2m4	13-6	00:08	The Cat's On His Way Out	-	3	3	1	AF	-	R	R	-	-	-		Syn	Syn	1	-	-	2	AC
2m5	10 - 1	00:11	Oh Dog, A New Look	10	3	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-		Syn	Syn	1	-	-	2	AC
2m6	14-0	00:11	A Superfly Fantasy	10	3	3	1	R	Ob	Cl	Bn	3	2	2		Pno	Syn	1	-	-	1+El	DH
2m7	18 - 4	00:17	Flies, Fly, Flo, Fun	10	3	3	1	R	Ob	B♭Cl	CB	2	2	2		Pno	Syn	1	-	-	2	DH
2m8	10 - 0	00:06	Big, Fat & Ugly	10	3	3	1	R	Ob	Cl	CB	3	2	2		Pno	Syn	1	-	-	2	DH
2m9	9 - 5	00:05	A Little Night Music	10	3	-	-	R	Ob	Cl	R	-	-	-		Syn	-	1	-	-	2	AC
2m10	14 - 2	00:04	Another Sucker Spidered	10	3	3	1	R	Ob	Cl	R	-	2	-		Syn	Syn	1	-	-	2	DH
2m11	15 - 7	00:05	Big, Ugly	10	3	3	1	R	CB	Cl	CB	3	2	2		Pno	Syn	1	-	-	2	DH
2m12	18 - 1	00:06	Fly-By Nite Visitor	10	3	-	-	AF	-	Cl	-	-	-	-		Syn	-	-	-	-	1	AC
2m13	8 - 6	00:06	Eve, Greed	10	3	3	1	R	Ob	Cl	Bn	3	2	2		Pno	Syn	1	-	-	2	DH
2m14	18 - 1	00:17	Big Mistake, Flyboy!	10	3	3	1	R	Ob	Cl	Bn	3	2	2		Pno	Syn	1	-	-	2	DH
2m15	17 - 1	00:12	Don't Trifle With Them	10	3	3	1	R	CB	Cl	Bn	2	-	2		Pno	Syn	1	-	-	2	AC
3m1	11 - 4	00:10	Easy Bake Coven Main Title	10	3	3	1	-	Ob	Cl	Bn	3	-	-		Pno	Syn	1	-	-	1	DH
3m2	9 - 5	00:04	The Smoking Lamp Is Lit	10	3	3	1	AF	Ob	B♭Cl	CB	3	2	2		Pno	Syn	1	-	-	1+El	DH
3m3	16 - 6	00:06	Which Is Which?	10	3	3	1	-	-	B♭Cl	CB	3	-	-		Pno	Syn	1	-	-	2	AC
3m4	15 - 5	00:15	Falling Every Witch Way'	10	3	3	1	R	Ob	Cl	Bn	3	2	2		Syn	Syn	1	-	-	1+El	DH
3m5	17 - 3	00:08	Witch Is Which!	10	3	-	-	AF	BH	Cl	Bn	-	-	-		Syn	Syn	1	-	-	1+El	AC
3m6	11 - 1	00:21	Bate Entertainment	10	3	3	1	R	Ob	Cl	Bn	3	2	2		Pno	Syn	1	-	-	2	DH
3m7	12 - 4	00:09	Frame Spotting	10	3	-	-	AF	BH	B♭Cl	R	-	-	-		-	Syn	1	-	-	2	AC
3m8	12 - 5	00:21	Witch Excitement	10	3	3	1	R	Ob	Cl	Bn	3	2	2		Pno	Syn	1	-	-	2	DH
3m9	13 - 4	00:01	Crossed-Witch	-	-	3	1	R	Ob	Cl	Bn	3	-	1		Pno	Syn	1	-	-	2	DH
3m10	15 - 6	00:05	That's Owl, Folks	10	3	-	-	-	-	Cl	-	-	-	-		Pno	Syn	1	-	-	2	AC
3m11	16 - 0	00:26	The Story Of Caramel Cod	10	3	3	1	R	Ob	Cl	Bn	3	2	2		Pno	Syn	1	-	-	2	DH
3m12	3m12	00:11	Which Witch Is Which?	10	3	3	1	R	Ob	Cl	Bn	3	2	2		Pno	Syn	1	-	-	2	DH
3m13	8 - 2	00:40		-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-		Syn	Syn	-	-	-	-	AC
3m14	10 - 6	00:03	Gracie Logo	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-		-	Syn	-	-	-	-	AC

Fig. 10.3. Master Cue Sheet and Orchestra Breakdown from The Simpsons.

Timing Notes

Once the master cue list is done, the music editor makes timing notes for every cue. *Timing notes* (also sometimes called *cue sheets*) are extremely detailed descriptions of every shot, every cut, and every line of dialogue in a scene, with timings to the hundredth of a second. The composer uses these notes to find exact moments to synchronize the music, and also to choose appropriate tempos for the cues. Timing notes are usually prepared on software such as Cue or any word-processing software. (See Fig. 10.4. Timing Notes from *Hearts on Fire*.)

The sequence of the music editor's tasks just described—creating temp tracks, attending the spotting session, music summary, and creating timing notes—are considered the traditional order of events. However, this sequence is changing in today's world as more and more composers begin to digitally sequence their scores by playing along to the video. For these composers, timing notes that describe every single visual event and line of dialogue are not necessary. More common in this situation would be an abbreviated form of timing notes, with a list of any sync points (see chapter 15) the composer wishes to make. A music summary will always be necessary to keep track of the many cues in a score, but it is important to understand that the music editor's job responsibilities change from composer to composer and from director to director.

Syncing and Recording

The next job for the music editor is assisting the composer in synchronizing the music to the film. He prepares click tracks and punches and streamers (see chapter 15, "Syncing the Music to Picture") for the recording session, and makes sure that the music and the picture—either video or film—are locked. Also, at the session, the music editor keeps a log for every take of each cue. If a cue needs to be moved either by a few frames or even by a few seconds, the music editor assists the composer in making the timing changes. This can involve changing tempos, moving bar-lines, or changing the placement of punches and streamers.

In addition, if after the recording session the director asks for significant changes in the music, or wants to place a cue originally

Production: **HEARTS ON FIRE** Production #: **R#3 Ver.4** Episode: **Video Date: 4/1/98**
Cue: **3m2** "**DOWNTOWN CHASE**"
Begins at **c3:01:44:17** in Reel/Act 3

ABS. SMPTE #(29):	REL. TIME:		
			Cops FRANK, BILL and JOEY are leaving restaurant. FRANK sees 2 bad guys and:"Hey that's them, hold it!"
c3:01:44:17	0.00		MUSIC STARTS over CLOSE "SHOOTER" (1st bad guy) as he STARTS to RUN
c3:01:44:23	0.20	CUT	CLOSE FRANK and JOEY thru window
c3:01:45:02	0.50		FRANK RUNS
c3:01:45:05	0.60	CUT	CLOSE 2nd bad guy TURNS to RUN
c3:01:45:20	1.10		FRANK CROSSES in FG as bad guy runs away
c3:01:46:02	1.50	CUT	WIDE STREET as BAD GUYS RUN toward CAM
c3:01:47:16	2.97	CUT	MED FRANK RUNS out Restaurant DOORWAY
c3:01:47:27	3.34		OS BILL:"**Hey FRANK!**"
c3:01:48:12	3.84	CUT	MED WIDE STOREFRONT as FRANK RUNS and BILL follows
c3:01:49:09	4.74	CUT	MED CLOSE FRANK as CAM PANS and BILL:"**GET 'EM, HE'S THE SHOOTER**"
c3:01:50:22	6.17	CUT	WIDE STREET as bad guys run down sidewalk
c3:01:51:07	6.67		FRANK into view in BG
c3:01:52:25	8.27		SHOOTER STARTS TOWARD CAM behind VOLVO
c3:01:53:15	8.94	CUT	LONG SHOT STREET as bad guys RUN ACROSS between cars
c3:01:54:24	10.24		FRANK and JOEY START ACROSS as tires SCREACH
c3:01:55:03	10.54	CUT	MED BAD GUYS as they weave thru cars
c3:01:56:02	11.51		CAR SCREACHES as SHOOTER DARTS RIGHT
c3:01:56:10	11.78	CUT	WIDE STREET as FRANK and JOEY run thru cars
c3:01:56:28	12.38		FRANK JUMPS UP ON HOOD of car
c3:01:57:03	12.55	CUT	MED WIDE FRANK FLIPS OVER HOOD as Guys Run in FG
c3:01:57:20	13.11	CUT	MED FRANK lands on street as BILL appears in BG

TOTAL TIME - 13.11

Fig. 10.4. Timing Notes from Hearts on Fire.

slated for an early reel into a later one, it will fall to the music editor to accomplish this task. Although this usually happens at the dubbing stage (see fig. 12.2), sometimes the music editor will move, edit, or rebuild a cue to have it ready for dubbing. This is a time when the music editor's job gets interesting and creative. Taking material meant for one scene and reworking it to fit another requires both technical and musical skill. In addition, this is where the music editor's diplomatic skills come in handy, because at this point he is answering to the director, who may or may not have the ability to communicate musically.

Eric Reasoner:

> *Changes occur [at the recording session], and they're subject to tastes of producers or directors—whoever's there running the show. It may be multiple people and that's also frustrating for the composer and any of us that are working to make it right. Basically, you're there to help fix problems. If you're in the booth and the composer's out on the stage, a lot of times you hear things said that would never be said if the composer was in the room, and that's a kind of a nerve-racking experience. So it's basically, figure out if there are problems and figure out what the problems are. If they're simple fixes, like subtracting elements of the music—something that the director doesn't like, you have to find out what they don't like. If it's a sound, a color, or a particular instrument, you can just get rid of it. If it's the whole cue, or how it's structured, then you're really in trouble. The composer will make the musical changes for the orchestra from the podium. But moving bars, and changing the form of the piece creates problems for the synchronization, which is the music editor's department. So you assist the composer by restructuring, whether it's in the computer program or whatever you used to line up the streamers or clicks.*

Dubbing

Once the music is recorded, it is mixed to whatever format the film requires—stereo, stereo surround-sound, digital, etc. The music editor then prepares the cues for the final stage, the dubbing. *Dubbing* is

when the music, dialogue and sound effects are mixed together for the final version of the film, a process that for an average film takes two to four weeks at the dubbing studio, or dubbing stage.

Until recently, the music editor would prepare reels of mag film with the final music cues that corresponded to reels of picture. Every cue would be placed in order, and if there were a few seconds or minutes of picture in between music cues, the music editor would insert blank film to fill the gaps. The mag film would then run simultaneously with the picture, sound effects, and dialogue at the dubbing stage.

Today, most dubbing is done digitally. The music editor comes to the dubbing stage with a digital file of all the cues, and runs these digital files locked to picture, sound effects, and dialogue via SMPTE time code.

Dubbing happens in two stages. The first is called *pre-dubbing*. At about the same time that the music is being recorded and mixed, the dialogue engineers clean up the dialogue tracks and get them to sound strong and clear, independent of the sound effects and music. (Each voice and each component of a sound effect has its own separate audio "track" that can be controlled independently. Music usually has two to eight tracks depending on the format.) Concurrently, the sound-effects people are doing the same thing in their own studio. One of the reasons pre-dubbing is so important is because of the complexity of some of the tracks; sound effects alone can have over one hundred separate tracks!

When the sound effects, dialogue, and music are all ready (independent of each other), then it is time for the final dubbing sessions when they are all put together. The music editor attends these sessions and assists the dubbing engineers in placing the music at the proper spots. He also has input on the levels and eq of the music.

Also present at the dubbing are the director and sometimes the film editor. This is a critical process because the precise levels of music, dialogue, and sound effects must be found. If one is too loud or soft, it

can be distracting or irritating. Also, depending on the format—stereo, stereo surround, digital, etc.—the mix is more or less complex. The director has the final say during this process.

It is at the dubbing session where a composer's music is most likely to be moved around. A director might not really like the cue the way it was designed, and will try a different cue in place of the original. Again, this is his prerogative and it is one that many directors utilize. Many cues from the best composers have been moved around on the dubbing stage. In the movie *Airplane*, during the climactic crash-landing scene, Elmer Bernstein had written a cue with many stops and starts as the picture cut back and forth between the airport gate areas and the plane itself. This was because the humor was in the people waiting, who were running to successively higher gate numbers as the plane came in on its crazy course. Director Jim Abrahams apparently didn't like these stops and starts, so he had the music editor take a low-end ostinato from earlier in the cue and loop it—that is, they repeated the ostinato over and over so there was continuous music throughout the cue instead of the stops and starts Bernstein had written. Incidents like this are not unusual, and the music editor is the one who must accomplish such changes. (The composer does not often attend the dubbing sessions and at this point is usually out of the picture, his job having been completed.)

Eric Reasoner describes the process:

> *It's extremely tedious. You're going back and forth, back and forth, over the same area of sounds with a different focus each time, and if your area of sound isn't of concern at the moment, it's really tedious and you'd like to get out of that room. You may very well spend a 12- or 16-hour day mixing one reel of film—that's a 10-minute segment of film. In action films, when they're really loud, you walk out of there and your ears are just completely fatigued. I can remember going home from the dubbing stage on* Die Hard With A Vengeance *after an action reel. I got up the next morning, and got in the car to go back to the dubbing stage. I started up the car and the radio came on with the volume*

up to 11. I was thinking, oh my god, I was listening at this volume last night when I drove home! It just kind of shows you what your ears and your body can do, shutting down after a bit.

Mark Isham tells how his music editor, Tom Carlson, works at the dubbing stage:

Tom understands the process very well, and he actually looks forward to being the knight in shining armor on the dubbing stage. He's got the patience. He knows how to hang with the guys—the mixers and the whole post-production crew. He's willing to put in those hours, and he's willing to wait until that tenth hour and say, "Can I hear it once with the music up?" And when the director says, "No," he'll just say, "Look, you're missing a chance to be more emotional." He fights the good fight and knows how to do it.

Once the dubbing is completed, there is one more task for the music editor: preparing a finalized list of all the music in the film. This is called a *music clearance sheet*, or *cue sheet*. (Note: cue sheet is a term that has several different uses. Some composers refer to timing notes as cue sheets.) This list is submitted to the appropriate organizations for licensing the music so that royalties can be paid. (Fig. 10.5. Music Cue Sheet from *Die Hard with a Vengeance.*)

After the music clearance list is prepared, the music editor's job is finished. As you have seen, the music editor performs an interesting, important, and unheralded role in the making of a film. In addition, although his musical allegiance and bond may be to the composer, ultimately the music editor answers to the director. An ability to work quickly and accurately under pressure, and also to work with grace under people who are not always kind or gracious, is a must. But the role of music editor is an exciting one that is also crucial to the successful completion of the score and the film itself.

TWENTIETH CENTURY FOX FILM CORPORATION

Music Cue Sheet

(Revised July 1998)

PAGE 1

PRODUCTION: DIE HARD WITH A VENGEANCE OB27

RELEASE DATE: MAY 1995 WORLDWIDE RIGHTS

1MA
COMPOSITION: TWENTIETH CENTURY FOX TRADEMARK :21 INSTR BACKGROUND
COMPOSER: ALFRED NEWMAN
PUBLISHER: T C F Music Publishing, Inc. (ASCAP)

1MB
COMPOSITION: CINERGI LOGO :20 INSTR BACKGROUND
COMPOSER: JERRY GOLDSMITH
PUBLISHER: CINERGI PICTURES ENTERTAINMENT INC. (BMI)

1MC
COMPOSITION: SUMMER IN THE CITY :49 VOCAL BACKGROUND
COMPOSER: STEVE BOONE/MARK SEBASTIAN/JOHN SEBASTIAN
PUBLISHER: TRIO MUSIC CO. INC./ ALLEY MUSIC, INC. (BMI)

1M1
COMPOSITION: SIMON SAYS FIND MCCLANE 1:21 INSTR BACKGROUND
COMPOSER: MICHAEL KAMEN
PUBLISHER: FOX FILM MUSIC CORP. (BMI)

1MD
COMPOSITION: GIFT RAPPED :14 INSTR BACKGROUND
COMPOSER: MARK MANGINI
PUBLISHER: T C F MUSIC PUBLISHING, INC. (ASCAP)

1ME
COMPOSITION: GOT IT GOIN ON :38 VOCAL BACKGROUND
COMPOSER: TED SILBERT/RICHARD BAKER
PUBLISHER: SILBERT MUSIC/HIC-TOWN UNDERGROUND/(ASCAP)

1MF
COMPOSITION: THE FAT OUTRO :38 VOCAL BACKGROUND
COMPOSER: D. LEE/J. OWENS
PUBLISHER: ZOMBA SONGS INC./BACK SLIDING MUSIC/
EIGHTY-SECOND SONGS (BMI)

2MA
COMPOSITION: WESTWOOD ON A FRIDAY NIGHT :13 INSTR BACKGROUND
COMPOSER: MARK MANGINI
PUBLISHER: T C F MUSIC PUBLISHING, INC. (ASCAP)

2MB
COMPOSITION: OFF MINOR 1:29 INSTR BACKGROUND
COMPOSER: THELONIOUS MONK
PUBLISHER: EMBASSY MUSIC CORP. (BMI)

Fig. 10.5. Music Cue Sheet from Die Hard with a Vengeance.
Used by Permission

CHAPTER 11

The Music Team: Orchestrators and Music Preparation

In today's world, film composing has become a team sport.
—William Ross

When writing for a large ensemble of instruments, a full score must be created. This is the version that has one line for every instrument—flutes, oboes, clarinets, French horns, trumpets, violins, etc.—and will be used by the conductor at the recording session. However, making this final score is very time consuming, and it is a job usually given to an orchestrator. So instead of filling in all the notes on a thirty- or forty-line piece of score paper, the composer writes a sketch of the music.

A *sketch* is a condensed version of the cue on 2 to 12 lines of score paper, where a composer lays out the measures and bar lines according to the timings required in a scene. The composer then fills in this sketch to varying degrees of completion. Whether eventually scoring for a full orchestra, a small ensemble, or even when sequencing, a sketch is like a map of the cue. It indicates the timings for each bar and shows the composer where the various dramatic events fall within the boundaries of the music. This sketch can be a simple 2-line piano style version or it can be as many as 10 or 12 staves. It can contain complete information for every melody, counter-melody, chord and even designate individual instruments, as in a John Williams sketch. Or it can be the barest bones, single-line melody with scant harmonic indications, the rest to be filled in by the orchestrator. This sketching process is a great time-saving device for the composer, and allows him to focus on getting the music written for each cue without getting lost in the details of notating the orchestration. It is important to note that many composers, especially the classically trained ones, are excellent orches-

trators. Some composers, like Ennio Morricone, insist on having enough time on the film to be able to do their own orchestrations. However, they may still complete a sketch first, and then orchestrate from it. (See Fig. 11.1. Sketch example and finished score.)

In some cases, the sketch itself is not even written down by the composer. This happens when the composer sequences parts of the cue or plays it live to some kind of tape format. In this case, the music needs to be transcribed, written out note-for-note as it is on the tape. Usually this is done by a third person, a *transcriber*, who listens to the cue, writes it out as a sketch, and then passes it on to the orchestrator. For composers who get their ideas by playing along to video, this system works well, for it enables them to work quickly without having to worry about setting notes down on paper.

In today's world of electronics, the sketch can also be generated as MIDI files. These MIDI files are given to an assistant to edit and make sure the printout matches the composer's music accurately. The orchestrator then works from the assistant's edited sketch. This is also known as a MIDI transcription. Some scores are electronic in the entire music preparation process; the composer generates a MIDI file, it is edited, the orchestrator orchestrates on a software program instead of by hand, and parts are generated automatically from the orchestrator's full score. All of these stages are often accomplished via e-mail or the Internet, so no one leaves his home or studio until the recording session.

Orchestrators

Once the composer has completed the sketch, or the transcription is prepared, the next stage in the journey to the recording session is the orchestration. As I mentioned, many film composers are fine orchestrators in their own right. In fact, many of these composers started out in the film-scoring business by orchestrating for established composers. However, many very talented film composers, especially those who come from the ranks of rock, pop, and solo jazz music, are not trained in orchestration and rely on their orchestrators to help them achieve an appropriate sound.

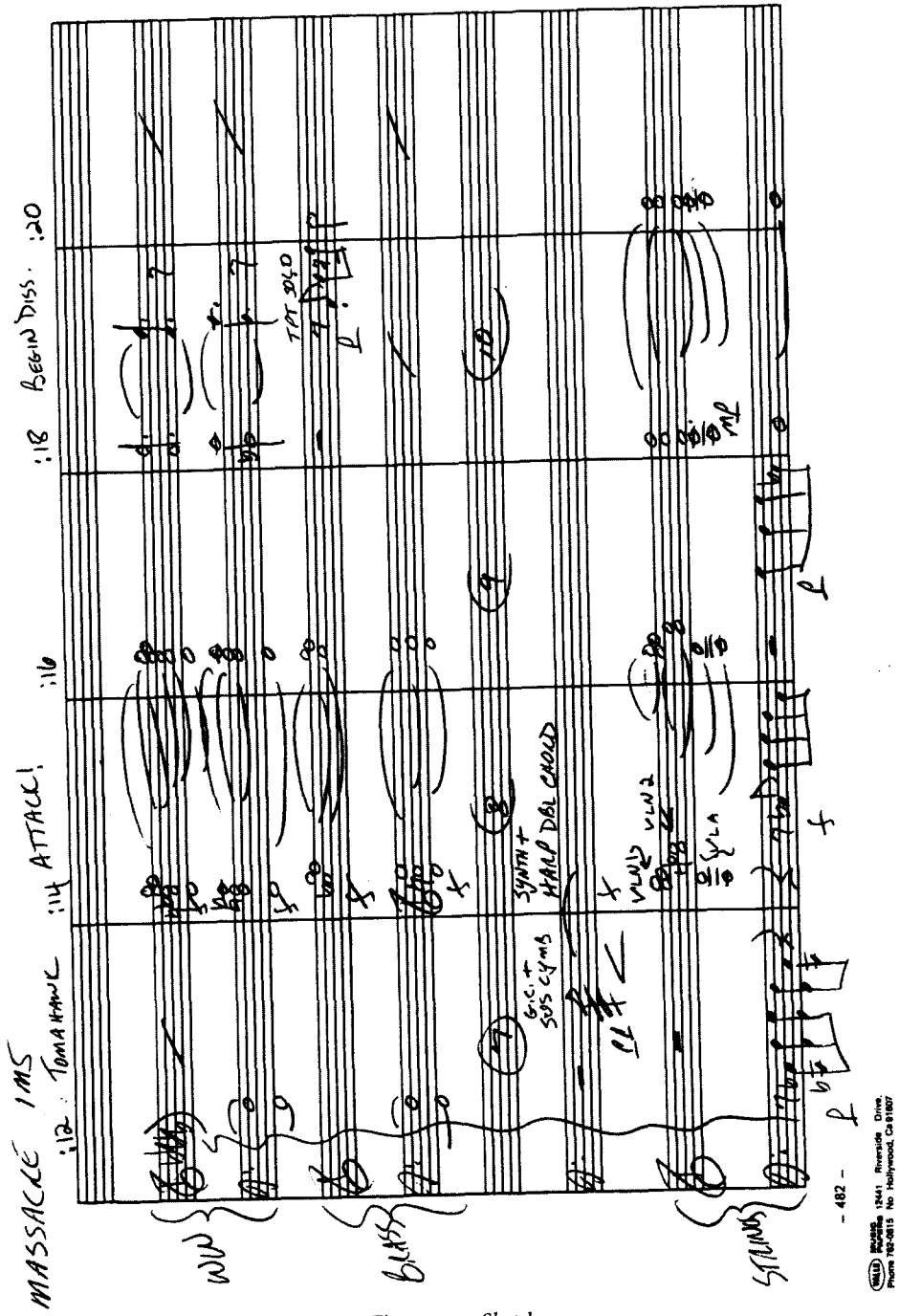

Fig. 11.1. p.1. Sketch.

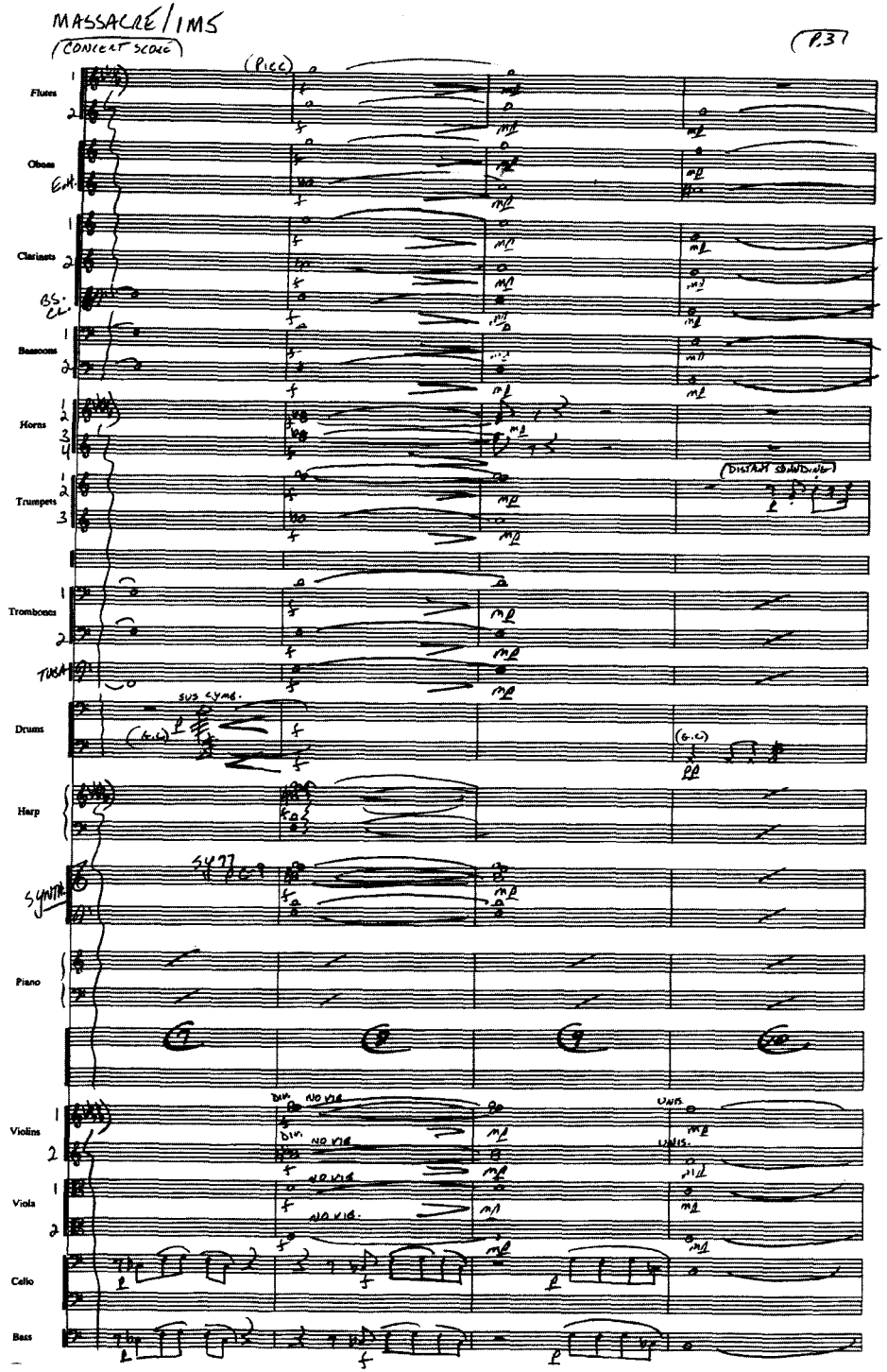

Fig. 11.1. p.2. Finished score.

William Ross:

> *An orchestrator is a problem solver. Your best skill as an orchestrator is your ability to solve a problem, whether it's musical, psychological, economic—whatever it is. That's the mission: to solve these problems.*

Orchestrators themselves can be from any background in music—classical, jazz, pop, country—but they must have studied composition and orchestration in depth in order to be able to execute what is required of them in a film score. Obviously, a full knowledge of many instruments is required: their high and low ranges, where they sound strong and where they sound weak, which rhythms sound natural and which ones sound awkward, whether there are any troublesome notes, and how they balance, overpower, or blend with other instruments. A thorough knowledge of composition is required since an orchestrator might be required to write a counterline, fill in a harmony, or voice-lead a series of chords.

When the sketch is ready, the composer usually meets with the orchestrator and discusses the cues. Depending on how complete the sketch is, the composer will give instructions as to who will play a certain part, or how loud or dissonant a specific measure might get. The orchestrator then goes home and begins working on the full score. Many orchestrators like to have a video of the cue with a window burn (see chapter 15) as well as the timing notes so that they can know exactly what is happening in the scene and how the music fits. Oftentimes, the composer and orchestrator have an ongoing relationship, faxing sketches to each other and discussing cues over the phone. This saves a great deal of time so the orchestrator does not have to go back and forth to the composer's home or studio. Once the full score is completed, the orchestrator delivers it to the composer to be proofed, and either a messenger brings it to the copyist or the orchestrator sends an electronic file to the copyist.

How much the orchestrator has to add, change, or rewrite depends on the composer and the individual project. Often it is a matter of the orchestrator's ability to determine whether the passage in question should remain as it is on the sketch or whether it should be changed.

William Ross has orchestrated for over 100 films, and is also a composer in his own right. He explains the orchestrator's role:

> *My job as an orchestrator is to assist the composer in getting the job done. Because of today's post-production schedules, it's very difficult for anyone to compose and orchestrate their own music.*

Orchestrators work as independent contractors; they are basically freelance and go wherever their services are needed. The pay scale for an orchestrator is determined by the musicians union (the American Federations of Musicians, or AFM), and is calculated by the number of pages scored (four measures per page) and the number of staves on the page. Depending on the texture and complexity of the cue, this could take a few hours or an entire day. The difficult cues and the easier ones tend to balance each other out in the long run.

One final thought on orchestrators. It is sometimes said that an orchestrator or team of orchestrators has saved a composer. At times this can be true. But the bottom line is that the composer has a vision of the finished music, and even if he sketches only the bare minimum, he is the driving force behind a score. Composers count on the orchestrator's ability to make the music sound good. So if the composer's musical concept is a sound one for the project, then the orchestrator is really just amplifying this concept. If the concept is poor, then no amount of help by the orchestrator can make it succeed.

Music Preparation: Copyists

Once the orchestrator completes the full score it goes to a music preparation office. In the old days of Hollywood, every studio had its own music preparation office. In fact, *all* the music people were under contract and they worked only for that studio. So, the music would go down an in-house assembly line, from composer to orchestrator to

music preparation to orchestra, and never leave the studio lot. Nowadays, everything is contracted out to individuals or small companies that have offices in various locations.

When an orchestrated cue arrives at the music preparation office, it is checked off on a master chart. There can be as many as forty or fifty individual cues for a single film, so there is a lot to track. The head of this office assigns one or more copyists to work on each cue. The *copyist* is the person who makes the parts up for the individual instruments. In the past two years (1997 to 1998), most of the copying work has converted from being handwritten to computer software-generated, usually either Finale or Erata. An orchestrator can turn in either a handwritten score, or a score done in one of these programs, and the copyist can prepare and extract the parts for the orchestra.

Once the copyist finishes a part for a cue, say the viola part, he then gives it to a proofreader. The *proofreader* checks the newly copied viola part against the master score for errors. This is to ensure that these errors are not discovered on the scoring stage where they would take costly minutes to fix (time on a scoring stage can cost several hundred dollars per minute). Once the proofreader completes a part or a stack of parts, he gives them to the supervisor of the music preparation office who then goes to the master chart and checks off those parts that are complete.

The next person in line is the music librarian. This is a crucial job. The *music librarian* sees that every musician in the orchestra has the proper music on his music stand at the start of the session. There can be as many as forty or fifty cues being recorded over just a few days. The composer is in communication with the music preparation office to say which cues he wants to record on which days, and to find out which cues are actually ready. The music librarian consults the master chart to make sure the desired cues are completed, takes the music to the scoring stage, and places the music on the stands of the musicians.

By this point in the production process, the film is often behind schedule, and all these music people can be working under enormous time pressure. It is common for the music preparation office to be in full

swing from 8:00 a.m. until after midnight, or even all night. All of these people are also musicians, and many of the copyists, proofreaders, and music librarians work their way to orchestrating and composing. These are all union jobs, jobs where the salary is dictated by the American Federation of Musicians, which also covers orchestrators and recording musicians. (Interestingly enough, composers do not have to belong.) Because the union has established good "scales" or rates, these music preparation jobs can be financially rewarding.

Because of the shortened schedules in modern post-production, the composer must rely on his team to get the score from conception to the big screen. This means having reliable people to assist with the myriad details of sequencing, orchestrating, copying, booking musicians, and so forth. The goal is to create a space where the composer can focus on composing, and everyone else does his part to accomplish that.

Fig. 12.1. Scoring Stage. Todd-AO Studios. Studio City, CA.

CHAPTER 12

The Recording Session and Mix

You forget and sometimes you have to pinch yourself and realize, "Oh my goodness, this is amazing!" These are the best players, definitely the best sight-readers in the world. Absolutely the best sight-readers. And, the mistakes-quotient is: there is hardly ever a mistake.
—Lolita Ritmanis

Finally the time has arrived when all the hours of work and preparation become a physical reality. There is nothing like walking onto the scoring stage and seeing dozens of musicians gathered there to play your music. It is the moment every composer waits for.

Present at the session are the composer, conductor (if the composer is not conducting), director, producer, music editor, musicians, recording engineers, and all kinds of assistants and on-lookers. The orchestrators are not required to be there, but often stop by to see how things are going. However, usually an orchestrator, or someone else with score-reading abilities, sits in the control room with the recording engineer and follows the score to check for errors that the conductor might not hear. This person also assists the engineer in determining which instruments are playing when (especially helpful if there is a solo of some kind). The music editor usually sits behind the conductor or in the control room at a table armed with all the timing notes, a copy of the score, and his computer(s).

This is also an exciting and sometimes anxiety-ridden moment for the film makers. They have put months or years of work into producing the film; all the writing, shooting and editing are complete and the music is the final element to be added. Stephen Spielberg has said that a film is "dry and lifeless" without music, and many agree with him. Even though the director and producer may have seen a sequenced mock-up of the cues, there is nothing like the real thing and there is an

air of anticipation, even apprehension, as the session begins. The reality is that when a director hands over the film to a composer, he has just lost control of the film for the first time. What the composer decides to do with the music can literally make or break the film. So the moment of truth is the first day of recording.

In the days or weeks before the sessions begin, the composer and music contractor discuss personnel requirements. The *music contractor*, or simply the *contractor*, books the studio, hires the musicians, takes care of all the union paperwork and the payroll for the musicians, and oversees the sessions to make sure everything is on time and happening according to union rules. In their initial conversations, the composer and contractor discuss the numbers of players and the breakdown of the orchestra—how many strings, woodwinds, brass, rhythm section players, etc., are needed. They also discuss any specific musicians the composer requests, and alternates. Some chairs have very specific requirements. For example, a woodwind chair might need someone who can play flute, soprano sax, recorder, and oboe. It is up to the contractor to find the appropriate players.

The music does not have to be recorded in the order it appears in the film, so the composer decides in advance which cues will be recorded in what order, and the music preparation office, as well as the music editor, are informed. There are different methods of beginning a session. Some like to start with something easy to warm up the orchestra, some like to begin with something fairly challenging. Most composers agree that if there is recurring thematic material, it is good for the orchestra to start with a cue where that material is fairly complete—usually the first or second cue—so that the musicians can hear it and recognize any variations or permutations down the line. Often, this is the main-title cue, but it could also come from another place in the movie.

Sometimes a film requires the entire orchestra to play on every cue. However, many times there are smaller groups that play various cues throughout the film, such as strings only, or a small group of strings, guitar, and oboe that are featured in several cues. In this case, the composer records all the cues for the larger group at one time, and then lets most of the players leave while the smaller group records. This is efficient and cost-effective. The larger group is known as the "A" orchestra, the smaller combinations the "B" orchestra, the "C" orchestra, etc.

Because of an agreement with the musicians union, there are certain rules governing the recording session. For feature films, a maximum of nine minutes of music per three-hour session may be recorded. (Sessions are usually booked in three-hour blocks.) For episodic television (series) and TV movies, a maximum of fifteen minutes per three-hour block is allowed. This is so the producers cannot take advantage of the sight-reading abilities of the musicians and record a huge amount of music in a short amount of time. If the session goes into overtime then these formulas are prorated. In addition, there are other regulations, like taking a ten-minute break every hour, a meal break after a certain amount of hours recording, etc. The contractor, who is the liaison to the union, attends the session and assists the composer in keeping track of these rules.

Once the cue is recorded to the composer's satisfaction, he goes into the control room to join the director and producer, and watch a playback of the scene with the music synced to the film. At this point, the director either signs-off on the cue, or asks for changes. Minor changes can be made right on the spot. If a major rewrite is required, the composer puts that cue away to be fixed before the next session, and he proceeds to another cue.

Every once in a while a composer's score is disliked by the director, the producer, or the studio executives. This can create a situation where the score is thrown out and another composer is brought in to redo it. This is embarrassing for the original composer and frustrating, as he has just spent several very intense weeks of his life on the project. It is also costly for the production team; they must still pay the first composer his full fee, they have paid the musicians and the recording studio for their time, and they must then must hire a second composer and pay the music production costs all over again. It is uncomfortable for all involved, yet it has happened to almost every major feature film composer in Hollywood.

One very important thing to keep in mind is that just because a score is thrown out does not mean that the music is bad, or even inappropriate for that film. All it means is that someone with enough power didn't like it. It is entirely possible that this person (director, producer, studio exec) had his own musical concept and could not make the shift to the composer's different, yet dramatically effective, idea. Whenever a score is thrown out, it causes composers to wonder if they are really good enough, or what they did wrong. It is possible, of course, that the score was not what the production team wanted and the composer made a big error in concept even though the music was sound. But it is also possible that the score was thrown out for an irrational reason that has nothing to do with the quality of the music.

Most of the time, the recording session is an exciting and rewarding moment for the composer. Music representing weeks of work is finally heard and its effectiveness evaluated. Flexibility is a key attribute to have at the session, for changes are often requested. Sometimes the director wants a little more dissonance or less musical activity in a cue. Sometimes a cue needs to be lengthened or shortened. Sometimes everyone, including the composer, is in agreement about a certain change, and sometimes the composer disagrees. The bottom line is that the composer needs to be able to make changes quickly without being overly attached to what was already written. Making movies is a team exercise.

Overlaps and Segues

There are some instances when a composer wants to score a scene, and rather than doing the music in one piece, he records two separate cues and edits them together to create one longer, seamless cue. This is called an *overlap* or *segue*. A composer might do this is if the scene is very long, if there is a significant mood or tempo change, or if there are two completely different groups of instruments involved in each cue.

Most composers like to keep each cue under three to four minutes. This is largely due to the recording process. Although the professional musicians that play the top film scores and television shows are incredible sight-readers, they do occasionally make mistakes. It is very

time consuming to stop the orchestra, go back to the start of the cue, reset the projection equipment if there are punches and streamers, and go for another take. In addition, at most sessions there is not true "separation" of the different players or sections of the orchestra in terms of multitrack recording. Although every section gets his own track, and soloists also get assigned a track, in the studio itself there is often bleed-through. So a composer or producer must be very careful about accepting a take and trying to "fix it in the mix." For this reason, it is common practice to try to get the best recording of the entire orchestra at once. (With digital editing, it is now easier to edit different takes together, but there is not always time for this.)

So, if a cue becomes too long, then many composers will find a spot to break it up into two or more cues that are recorded separately and edited together. This can be done seamlessly by matching harmonies, finding common tones from one cue to another, or matching instrumentation. The music editor reassembles the parts into one longer piece.

Such segues are planned when the composer writes the score. The composer constructs a segue from one cue to another so that the sonorities match, or don't match, as is necessary.

Mixing and Dubbing

For a major feature film, the orchestra is recorded in 24-track or 48-track analog format, or one of the many digital multitrack formats. This gives the mixdown engineer great flexibility in the final mix. This is necessary because there might actually have to be more than one mix of the music: one for surround-sound digital theatrical playback, one for stereo theatrical playback, and one for the soundtrack CD. Depending on schedules, the composer is not always at the mixing session, often leaving it to a trusted associate.

Because of the tight post-production schedule, the many minutes of underscore must be mixed quickly. In the modern age of automated mixes (where the mixing boards are "smart" and remember fader levels, eq settings and outboard routings), the engineer actually mixes during the recording session itself. That is to say, he sets levels, adjusts

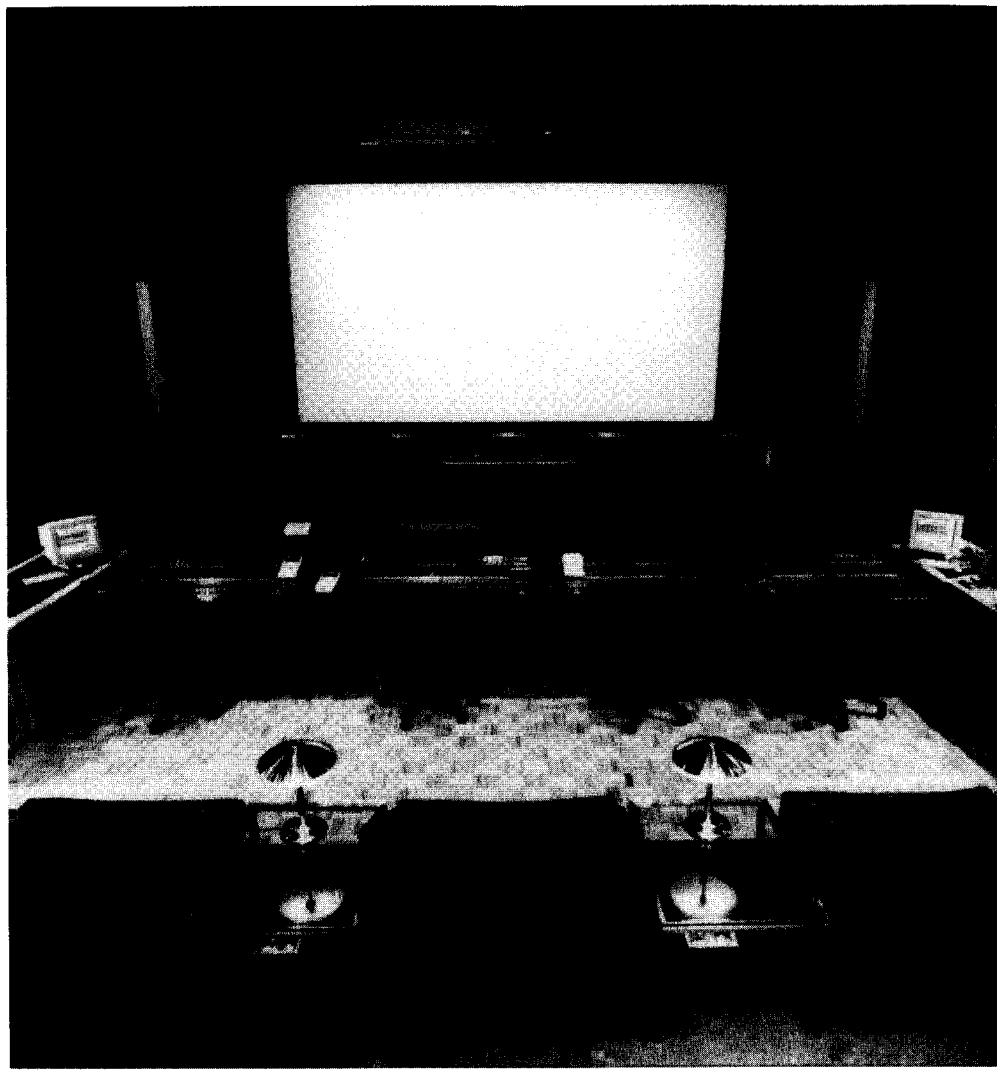

Fig. 12.2. Dubbing Stage. Studio 1, Todd-AO Studios. Hollywood, CA.

eq, and gets a rough version of the mix, so that when the music is finally mixed for real, he has a head start. A good film-score engineer can mix five to ten minutes per day. This is for an orchestra that can have as many as 80 to 100 players! Compare that to the pop-music record mix, which is going very quickly if one or two four-minute songs per day are completed.

Ideally, the same person who engineers the recording session should do the mix. This person is the most familiar with the cues, and thus can move fast. However, sometimes this is not possible. Oftentimes, the schedule is so tight that the music must be mixed as soon as it is recorded. This means that the mixing can overlap the recording. A recording session might begin on Tuesday; on Wednesday, the recording session continues, while Tuesday's tracks are mixed at a second studio.

After the music is mixed to the proper format, it goes to the dubbing stage. This is where the music, sound effects, and dialogue get mixed together for the final soundtrack (see chapter 10).

Reel by reel, scene by scene, line by line, and sometimes crash by crash, the dubbing team mixes, filters, eqs, pans, and generally tweaks the music, sound effects, and dialogue to blend together. Of course, the dialogue is the paramount force here. It always must be heard. But the music and sound effects have important roles as well. The toughest thing is when two sounds happen in the same frequency range. For example, a very high, sustained note in the violins could be cancelled out by the whine of a jet engine. Or a male actor's tender but somewhat throaty declaration of love could be challenged by a lyrical cello line. It is the job of those on the dubbing stage to make all of these things sound like one continuous whole. A sound palette that sounds natural and lets each voice or sound speak where necessary is the ultimate goal.

Dubbing is the next to last stage in the entire film-making process, and it is actually the final stage of the creative process. Nothing can be changed or altered after the dubbing, for the only stage left after this is "color correction"—when the film is processed and the director approves its colors and tints. In many ways, dubbing is the point of no return for the director, for at the various stages of production and post-production, changes can and will be made frequently. During the making of the film, the director makes many decisions, and commits to many paths of action, but the decisions made at the dubbing stage are the final commitment. For this reason, it is a detailed, painstaking process, and the feeling of completion is profound for all.

The Music

PART III

CHAPTER 13

Creating the Music

It's like anyone else. If the plumber doesn't take the wrench out of the bag, he's never going to get that pipe off, right? Well, if you don't sit down and play something or write something, you're never going to get it finished.
—Mark Isham

There are times when the most intimidating experience a composer can have is looking at a blank sheet of paper or computer screen. And there are other times when that same blank paper can be something he looks forward to filling with wonderful, exciting ideas. This is the reality of the creative process; there are ups and downs, there are times when the ideas just keep coming, and times when the stream is stone dry. For a composer working in films, there is usually no luxury of waiting until the juices start flowing. Often he must find a way to turn on the faucet himself.

Three Cornerstones of Composition

There are several important, yet simple concepts that can help in actually controlling and sometimes even jump-starting the creative process: first, having a foundation of craft and knowledge of music; second, knowing what you want to say dramatically, emotionally, and psychologically; and, third, knowing your own strengths, weaknesses, and capacity to produce. In the film-scoring business, these are all extremely important. As we have seen in other chapters, because the composer comes in at the end of the film-making process, the pressure to produce in a timely manner is often enormous. So a composer relies on his craft, the intent of what he wants to say, and knowledge of his own capacities to deliver the score on time.

Craft

It is important to have developed your craft so you have as much technique as possible. If you write great romantic melodies, but that is all you do well, then obviously you are rather limited. If you are great at action/adventure films, what will you do if the project you accepted requires some scenes in the style of To Kill A Mockingbird? Will you find someone to ghost it?

The more you know about music, and the more different kinds of music you have analyzed extensively, the more tools you have at your disposal. Your musical vocabulary becomes larger and you can speak in many musical languages. Traditional orchestral, atonal, jazz oriented, or pop-music derived soundtracks will not intimidate you if you are thoroughly familiar with how these styles work.

For many, this is an ongoing life-long process that begins early. For every composer there are variations on the theme of musical learning and development. When you begin a project, if you can draw upon many different kinds of musical expressions, you are much better off. You will know the kinds of harmonies, rhythms, and melodies to write. As you watch a scene, or when you sit down to write, your familiarity with a style may start to suggest possibilities. Or if you are stuck, your knowledge of what it should sound like can bail you out. For example, if you know the director wants a particular scene to be heroic, there are certain rhythmic and melodic devices that you can draw from to create something of your own. On the other hand, if your background is narrow, and you are asked to write something outside of what you know, it can be difficult and time-consuming, if not flat-out impossible, to create something appropriate.

Study requires discipline and curiosity. If you are not interested in a particular style, if it doesn't make you sit up and take notice, curl your ears, or give you goose-bumps, then study that style as an academic exercise. This can be a necessary academic exercise for the aspiring film composer.

Alf Clausen, Emmy-winning composer for *The Simpsons*, strongly believes in the need for musical curiosity and study. He speaks about this issue in relationship to writing songs in different styles:

> *[Students'] questions are always very pointed about "How do you do this, how do you do that, how do you write these styles, etc." My response is to ask, Have you dissected the popular songs of all the eras to find out what makes them work? Have you analyzed them to find out what the chord progressions are, what the melodic tricks are, what chord tones on what chords created a certain sound in a certain era? And can you sit down and write a song in that style because you have spent hundreds of hours dissecting those songs? And they say, "Not yet." Well, I have. I have spent thousands of hours dissecting and playing those songs. It's a matter of craft, it's a matter of study.*

Intent and Concept

The intent of your music, or knowing what you want to say, is crucial. There is such a large range of emotion and feeling that can be expressed by music that it often takes a lot of thought, contemplation, and sometimes even prayer to figure out what to do with a particular film or scene. But to start writing without knowing what you want to say is like trying to swim without knowing the strokes; when you get in the water, you would just flail around and desperately try to stay afloat. It is important to take in a whole lot of information: the flow of the drama, the look of the film, and probably most important for the composer, the tempo of the scene. Every film and every scene has its own musical implications, and the composer must know what a film or scene means before beginning to write.

Elmer Bernstein has composed the scores to over 200 films, and is quite familiar with this process:

> *The first thing I do is to spend a week just looking at the film without prejudice. When I say without prejudice, I say to myself, I'm not even going to try to think music during this week. I just want to look at the film until the film talks to me and the film*

tells me things. What I want the film to tell me is what it's about, and that's not always on the surface. What is the film about? What is the function of music going to be in this film? Why are we having music in this film, what's it going to do? So I start with those kinds of thoughts—it's a kind of intellectual process rather than a composing process.

Now, I had a big problem with that in To Kill a Mockingbird, *because if you look at the film without music, all you're looking at is a film with a lot of kids in it. But you're also seeing a lot of adult problems—problems of racism, problems of injustice, death and violence, violence to children. So it took me the longest time to find where the music was going to go, how it was going to go, and what its specific use would be in the film. I determined after a long time—it took me six weeks—that the film is about the adult world seen through the eyes of children. All these problems, what we call adult problems, are seen as the children see them. Which led me to childlike things. For instance, playing the piano one note at a time, music box sounds, harp, bells, things of that sort. So what really got me into the film was the realization—at least, my realization—that it was a film about adult things seen through the eyes of children.*

Taking six weeks, as in *To Kill a Mockingbird*, to think about the approach to a film is a luxury most film composers don't have today. But they usually can take a few days, or perhaps a week, to come up with ideas. Once the concept becomes clear, ideas will often start to flow because the composer has a firm sense of direction.

Knowing Yourself

Dick Grove, a well-known music educator in Los Angeles, used to say, "We all think we're writing music to make money, or to move people. But what we're really doing, if we just take a look, is finding out about ourselves." When we sit down to write music, many things about ourselves come into play: How disciplined am I? How much do I trust my training and ability? How much do I believe in myself? Am I actually enjoying writing music, and having fun? Or is it a chore? Am I following the instructions of the client, or is my ego too big to listen to anyone other than my own infallible creative voice? On the other hand, am I too concerned with what people will think of me to stand up for my opinions, especially if someone asks for something I know is musically a bad idea?

These questions, and others, can come into play every time a composer accepts a gig. At some level in every writer's consciousness, there is an expression of one or more of these questions, whether they have acknowledged it or not. For example, are you the type that procrastinates until the last minute? If so, get a handle on it, for a film with 60 minutes of music won't get written the night before. Do you have a problem taking direction and/or feedback? Lose it, because as soon as you sign the contract, you are somebody's employee. Do you know you can write quickly and appropriately? Nurture that and utilize it. Are you very organized and structured? Stay organized, but don't forget to stay flexible.

When a composer sits down and starts to write, it is essential that he be brutally honest about these questions. He must know how many minutes a day he can produce, how many days there are before the recording session, which cues seem to be suggesting musical ideas, and which cues are tougher. There is very little time for second-guessing and extensive rewriting of any one cue, so confidence in ones technique is crucial. Being clear in ones communication with the director and a willingness to translate the director's requests into music are fundamental to this process.

Developing the Concept for the Score

In speaking with composers, the one thing that comes through again and again is that the most successful scores have a concept that drives the music. Then, once the concept for the whole score is set, each individual cue presents a particular problem to be solved. For example, just because the main concept for a film is big, orchestral, and Romantic doesn't mean that there cannot be a piano solo if the drama calls for it. But that piano solo must still feel like part of the rest of the

score. In today's world, almost any musical language is part of the composer's palette, so the choices abound. But keeping to the overall concept keeps the sound focused.

Elliot Goldenthal is an accomplished composer of film scores, ballets, theatre, and concert works. He has found a way of approaching a score that produces a unique sound for each of his projects:

> *Before I approach anything, I have a very strong concept of what I want to pull off, whether it works out or not. That might include limiting the choice of pitches or a very clear choice of orchestration. So I don't go into something and just start improvising, I find that if I do that, I just sort of waste my time. I stay away from the piano, away from the computer, away from the pencil. I think about the scene and I say, How can I achieve the dramatic effect that is necessary for the scene and have it still sound fresh? How can I make it sound like you haven't heard that before, you haven't lived that before? Sometimes the answer can be surprisingly simple. In* Alien 3, *for example, I used a solo piano to underline the scene with the little girl because I thought that having a piano way out in space would remind you of the most domestic of all instruments—it would remind you of home. Just things like that. That's a concept.*

Sometimes a composer's concept for a film can be generated from a feeling or an idea that, in itself, is not musical. Many composers are very artistic in the way they look at the world; that is to say, they see the world in terms of emotional responses that eventually get translated into music. Clearly, this is a very valuable way to see things from the standpoint of writing music for the visual medium of film. Cliff Eidelman discusses his conception of the score to *One True Thing*:

> *I had this idea of time changing, the changing of seasons. The feeling of wind passing through trees and then leaves blowing off in another direction. This wasn't music yet; it was just a feeling I wanted to add.*

> *I set individual instruments apart from the orchestra, separated into their own isolation booths. Like three cellos in one room, or three violas with two woodwinds in another. They were off in their own rooms and the orchestra was in the center. Now, my concept was that the piano should be the main idea, accompanied by a small orchestra so that it felt intimate, and never too large. An introverted mood.*
>
> *I also wanted it to feel like wind was carrying the music this way and out that way, creating different perspectives. The music wasn't just coming from the center of the room. It was coming from over here, and it shifted over there, and then it would come back over here.*
>
> *So, early on, this conceptual approach merged with the themes. When I started producing musical ideas, my concepts worked their way in.*
>
> *For me, the main thing is always the spine of the story. So, the first thing I do is look for that emotional core—that emotional spine of the story—within the soul of the music itself.*

In *Forrest Gump*, Alan Silvestri had to come up with an opening music cue that would embody the whole film. He first discussed the opening shot, of the feather floating down from the sky and almost landing on Forrest, with director Robert Zemeckis:

> *[Zemeckis] didn't really go into a whole lot of detail, but the gist of what we did talk about was somehow, "This is the start of the movie. This is the start of this whole incredible odyssey we're about to go on." My take on it was ... I've got a couple of things to deal with now. One is, I've got physical things to deal with. I've got some events; the feather floats from the blue sky, makes an entrance into this town. It winds up almost landing on somebody's shoulder then at the last moment it's blown off. It's very symbolic, you know, if you're looking at this as something descending upon someone's life, that guy is not chosen right now. Then eventually the feather lands on Forrest; he's the chosen one.*

So now we've got some physical things in terms of the image, and we've also got some events that are episodic in a sense. Coming from nowhere, blue sky, into this town, what does it mean? It's just a feather, then it almost lands on somebody, blows off. Now, there's some kind of dramatic context.

So now, what do you do? The invisible aspect of this is that somehow whatever you do also has to essentialize and embody this entire film. Right now. This cannot be "feather music." This cannot be "falling down music." This cannot be "missed opportunity music." This music somehow has to take everything, sentiment wise, that this film is about, and somehow essentialize it and present it. I'm thinking, at this point, if I can find that, I've got the key to this film. This theme will be all over the movie, and there will be a tremendous sense of cohesiveness for the overall tone of this film.

Now of course all of this is going on under the surface because I'm not sitting there making lists and treatises on 1M1. *I know I've got to do something here. So I sit down at the piano, and I'm thinking, "This music has to deal with Forrest," and I start doodling at the piano. Literally in 20 minutes it's done! It's childlike, and it's simple, and yet it's not baby-like. It's innocent. It's what I'm feeling from Forrest. I look at this moment, where the feather moves away from this other guy. I make a key change there—an immediate unprepared key change there. We already planned that we're going to bring the orchestra in, with more sense of scope at this point.*

That was the mission in Forrest. *It had to be an honest attempt. Musically, as an actor, as a writer, as a cinematographer, don't get cute with this movie, or you'll sink the ship.*

This anecdote embodies many of the principles outlined above with Silvestri's own personality and musical sensibility bringing it to its ultimate destination. He had a clear idea of what he needed to do, and what *not* to do dramatically. And having this understanding, he was able to sit down and create the theme that was just right for this film.

(Ironically, this theme was eventually used in only one other spot in the film: the ending where we see the feather again. Every time he tried to use it elsewhere, it just didn't work.)

One of the joys of film composing is this process of discovering a concept. Unlike writing concert works or pop songs, the film composer is responding to the visual images and the story on the screen. These images and story-lines suggest musical ideas and provide a framework within which the music can fit. Many composers have said that once they find the initial concept, the rest of the score writes itself. The trial and error, the thought, and contemplation often result in the stimulation of the composers imagination. Then he experiences the satisfaction of completing the director's vision of the film in the language of music.

CHAPTER 14

Technical Requirements of the Score

Nobody goes to the movies to listen to the score.
The score is simply assisting them in watching the film.
—Michael Kamen

Once a composer arrives at a concept for the score, he is ready to begin writing individual cues. However, there are many things to consider for each cue: its placement in the film, what kind of scene it is, whether or not there is dialogue, and how much of the story the music should express. These are just some of the many important considerations in structuring the score of a movie.

Perhaps the most important factor here is that a film can be anywhere from a short subject of just a few minutes to a full-length feature of over two hours. Either way, as the story unfolds on screen, the music must continually develop so that it stays interesting. Themes develop, instrumentation develops, and the overall emotional thrust of the music has an arch that matches the arch of the film. In addition, the music can affect the way the film has been put together; it can smooth out cuts, transitions, or dissolves. It can also help the audience understand shifts in location in time or place. Every cue has an impact that the composer and director are considering when placing it in the movie.

The first question that faces the composer is "What is this cue's dramatic function?" For the purposes of this discussion, I divide the various functions of film music into three broad categories: physical functions, psychological functions, and technical functions. As the interviews at the end of this book illustrate, every composer has a different working procedure. They each approach the task of writing a score and coming up with suitable material from a different angle.

Sometimes they intellectually analyze a scene and determine its musical requirements; sometimes they write from instinct. Frequently, some of the functions of the music overlap, or are vague, because every situation is different and can have more than one dramatic implication.

Physical Functions

Music frequently functions in a way that impacts the physical action or location of the scene. This includes:

Setting the location of the film. If a movie takes place in an exotic location, often this setting is reflected in the music. For example, a movie that takes place in Ireland could use Uillean pipes and a pennywhistle. A movie that is set in the Appalachian Mountains of the United States might call for banjos and fiddles. How much this "ethnic" music is incorporated into the score will be a decision made by the composer and the director. They could decide to have the score sound authentic to the location, or simply incorporate one or two elements of the ethnic music into an orchestral score. (See chapter 15 for more on this.)

Setting the time period. If a movie takes place in another historical era, sometimes music of that time will be used. For example, if a film is set in 18th century Europe, a harpsichord can be used to give the audience an immediate association with that time. For movies set in medieval times, there are various ancient instruments like shawm, sackbutt, or psaltery that can be used. Again, as in *setting the location*, the composer may use a lot of these sounds, or just a hint.

Mickey-mousing. When the music mimics every little action on screen, it is called *mickey-mousing*. There is a difference, however between mickey-mousing and simply hitting various sync points. Mickey-mousing is a term reserved for hitting a lot of the action, not just one or two moments. It is often, though not exclusively, used as a comic device.

Intensifying the action. This musical technique is commonly used in action scenes. Chase scenes, fights, intense arguments between characters, and suspenseful moments are all heightened with appropriate music. To intensify the drama, composers might write music that closely follows the action onscreen, and often has many sync points. In this way, music partners with the drama very closely and accentuates what is seen, as opposed to bringing a different emotional element to the scene.

Psychological Functions

Music can assist the psychological and emotional impact of the film in many ways. Sometimes it can be parallel to the drama and say basically the same thing as what is viewed on-screen. At other times, the music can add a new dimension, thought, or idea that is not expressed by dialogue or action. Some of the psychological functions of film music are:

Creating the psychological mood. Every film score must have a "sound" to be successful. If the movie is one that has psychological implications, then the overall mood of the score or any individual scene becomes very important. For example, in *What Dreams May Come*, a film that deals with death and the afterlife, a score was originally composed that was dark and somewhat serious. The production team decided that this approach did not work; it was too dark and needed to be lightened up. So they brought in Michael Kamen to redo the score three weeks before the release of the film.

Michael Kamen:

> *The original score was too serious. This film is about death and dying and it's a very serious film. I was asked to go the other way with it. I felt very close to the subject matter, as I had a real life experience at that time: my wife had just overcome a mortal illness. So I was able to respond to the film with joy and some sense of magic.*

There are countless examples of a change in the music altering the impact of a scene or an entire movie. The composer must continually be aware of the result of any musical moods, or even individual melodies or harmonies.

Revealing the unspoken thoughts and feelings of a character. Often, a director wants the audience to understand something about the char-

acter that is either not expressed verbally or not entirely clear from the visual action. The music can help to communicate these things because it can represent another dimension of the character's inner world—his thoughts, feelings and deepest emotions. A good example of this is the movie, *Thunderheart,* starring Val Kilmer. In this film, Kilmer plays an FBI agent sent to investigate a murder on an American Indian reservation. His father was half Indian and part of the plot deals with his character's struggle to understand his own heritage and ancestry. Towards the beginning of the film, when Kilmer's character first arrives in South Dakota, he sees an ancient Indian costume on display. The visual shows him simply staring at the costume, expressionless, but the music is tense and dark, representing his confused frame of mind.

Revealing unseen implications. How many times have we watched the good guy draw his gun and slowly walk down a deserted alley in search of the bad guys? Then the low strings come in with a sustained, swelling note, and we *know* they're out there somewhere! The music can tip us off to what is going to happen, both in a suspenseful way, and in a way that resolves a situation.

Deceiving the audience. In the same way as *revealing unseen implications*, the music can set us up to believe something will happen, but then a different event takes place. Sometimes known as a "reversal," in this case the music can simply be mirroring what we see on screen, or it can add another dimension to a scene that is visually neutral. This is most often used in suspenseful situations.

Technical Functions

The technical functions are when the music aids the overall structure of the film:

Creating continuity from scene to scene. (Also known as "making a transition.") Music can help the viewer make a transition from one scene to another. This is a result of the way the human brain processes information. If we watch a scene that ends, and then we cut to another scene in a different location, obviously the eye is very aware of this change.

Many times an abrupt visual change is appropriate, but sometimes it is desirable to soften this change. Music can help achieve this by beginning in the first scene, and carrying over to the second. In this way, both the eye and the ear are engaged; the eye takes in the abrupt scene change, and the ear hears a continuous piece of music. The total effect is one that is smooth; the music effectively overrides the visual aspect.

Creating continuity of the entire film. By using themes and textures that return throughout the film, the music can create a continuity of sound. These can be leitmotifs, where certain characters, emotions, or places have distinct musical motifs. There might also be one or several themes that appear in various instruments and harmonic settings. Or there could be a certain combination of instruments or sounds that carry through the entire film. By continually developing one or more elements of the music further, such as certain melodies or instrumentation, the composer can create a dramatic build. Here are three examples:

In *Fly Away Home*, Mark Isham uses a small ensemble featuring solo viola during much of the first part of the film. As the story grows and becomes more dramatic, so does the size of the orchestra. However, the same theme appears throughout, played by the different size groups. This creates a unity in the music even though the sonority grows in size.

In *E.T., The Extra-Terrestrial*, John Williams presents fragments of a particular theme throughout the film in various scenes. It is not until the climactic "flying scene" that these fragments come together as a complete musical statement. This is an example of the music developing with the plot. The basic musical idea is similar in several situations, but the audience doesn't hear it as a complete idea until the story line is also complete.

In *Speed*, Mark Mancina uses a combination of several metallic-sounding samples to create an electronic texture. This is used throughout the film as a sound "palette" that mirrors the urgency of the dramatic situation.

Following the Drama

This is the part of writing a film score that separates those who really can from those who would like to. There are many composers who can write excellent music, but not all are sensitive to the film's action or the director's vision. Once the spotting is done, the director has given his input, the placement of themes has been decided, and the deadlines are clear, then all that is left is to choose which notes will sound and who will play them. These choices are inherently subjective. Every composer decides a scene's musical needs according to his own dramatic sensitivity and musical taste. Many choices contribute towards determining the shape and tone of the music in each scene. Remembering that the music is a partner to the drama also helps keep the focus of the music. Some of these choices are:

- Tempo. What is the rhythm of the film editing? How are the individual shots cut together? What is the overall pacing of the movie? Are there musical tempos implied by this?
- Are there many sync points? Just one or two? Or is the music meant to just "wash" over the scene?
- Are there moments that require a musical comment?
- How much is the music telling the story? Or is it more neutral and mood-setting?
- Is there source music in the beginning or end of the cue that needs to be taken into account in terms of key, tempo, etc.?
- What is this cue's placement in relation to the whole dramatic arch of the film?
- Where is this cue's placement in terms of other cues? Are they close in time? Do the keys have to match?
- Should the cue modulate for dramatic or musical reasons?
- Should there be orchestration changes accompanying the drama?

This list can go on, for the composer must answer many questions and make many choices. But this process is not always a conscious one. The more experienced a composer gets, the more his instincts get developed.

Many of the questions above are asked and answered on a subconscious level. However, it is important to look at every film and break down every scene from many angles in order to really make the music fit.

Writing for Dialogue

Writing for a scene with dialogue is one of the trickiest things for a composer. There is no one way to do it, for every situation is different. The approach to writing music under dialogue is determined by any number of factors, including the mood of the scene, the pacing of the scene, the amount of sound effects present, and the importance of the dialogue itself to the plot. And ultimately, the music will probably be dubbed, or mixed in, very low under the actors' lines. This is the natural fate of film music, for it is meant to accompany the action, and only infrequently does it take a starring role.

There are different schools of thought on the use of music under dialogue; some believe that it is good to move the music when the actors pause, and sustain the music when the actors are speaking. This is a technique used by many composers over the years. Some composers always write sustained tones during dialogue—this is another valid technique. However, it is best to consider every situation to be different, having its own musical requirements.

In order to determine the appropriate music for dialogue scenes, there are melodic, harmonic, and orchestrational factors to take into consideration. How active should the melody be? How thick should the chord be? What instruments should play? Here are several questions to consider when writing under dialogue:

What is being said? If the actors are declaring their undying love, or if some important element of the plot is being revealed, then the music must support that mood, and at the same time stay out of the way. One way to do this is to write a very transparent texture that allows the voices to cut through. However, sometimes a rich texture is appropriate; the theme could soar into the stratosphere while the actors are speaking, and the music will be mixed very low underneath the dialogue.

Who is speaking? There are times when a particular register of a certain instrument conflicts with the actor's voice. For example, cello or French horn played between middle C and C an octave below share the same range as most male voices, and might fight for attention with the dialogue. Instruments between G below middle C, and G an octave higher might fight with a woman's speaking voice. However, whether or not such conflicts actually occur depends on the quality of the voice and the way the melody is constructed. The kinds of intervals used, the tempo, and the overall busyness or simplicity of the melody also contribute to the degree of conflict. Large melodic intervals, quicker tempos, syncopated rhythms, and busy melodies tend to draw the audience's attention to the music and away from the dialogue.

What is the pacing of the dialogue? Are the lines spoken quickly, with urgency, or is the actor taking his time? Are there pauses between each line, or do they come rapid-fire, with each line overlapping the previous one? These considerations will help determine how fast the music moves. For example, the composer can accentuate quickly-spoken lines with very active music, or he can provide a cushion for those lines with long sustained tones.

What is the pacing, or tempo, of the film editing? How the film is edited can provide another clue to finding appropriate music under dialogue. For example, as with the pacing of the actors lines, the composer can write music that mirrors a lot of fast cuts, or it can soften those cuts with a melody line of long tones.

Perhaps the most important point to make about writing music for dialogue is that the music should not draw too much attention to itself. Ninety-nine percent of the time, the dialogue reigns. If the music draws too much attention to itself, two things are likely: the cue will be rejected and the composer asked to redo it, or it will be dubbed very low in the mix. The best music under dialogue is that which reflects the dramatic situation, can be heard through the speaking, and allows the voices to be in the foreground without any aural conflict.

The Main Title

The music that is played at the beginning of the movie when the credits are rolling is called the *main title music*, or simply the *main title*. The goal of the main title music is to set the mood and tone of the film. The audience needs to know what kind of story they are about to experience, and the music should tell them. There are several different approaches to this music, which will be determined by the director's vision. If there are simply credits rolling and the names are all that is seen, then the music will probably be featured. Similarly, if the credits are rolling, and we are seeing footage of the location of the film, the music will also be featured. However, if there is dialogue while the credits are rolling, then the music takes a more subservient role; it will not be so much in the foreground, and act more as an underscore.

The main title music is often one of the few places where the composer can "stretch out" a little bit because there are often no dramatic moments to hit, and because the cue is usually about two to four minutes long. This is enough time to make a complete musical statement, especially if the theme has an "A" and "B" section, whereas in many cues during the movie there is not enough time to complete these ideas.

The End Credits

The *end credits* come when the film has ended, and all the people that worked on the film are being named. Often the music in this part of the film is a song, rather than instrumental music based on the underscore. The reason for this is usually pure commerce. Producers hope that because the song is the last thing heard, that it will stick in people's minds and make them want to buy the soundtrack album. This is a logical business decision, but often one that has very strange dramatic implications. It can feel like an intrusion when at the end of a two-hour movie with an orchestral underscore, a pop song with drum set, synthesizers, electric guitar, and electric bass suddenly begins.

However, there are many films that do use orchestral music to accompany the end credits. In this case, the composer usually develops themes presented during the film. Because of the length of the end credits,

often five or six minutes, and the fact that the composer is free from dramatic considerations, he can write a piece that is more like a suite. Unfortunately, very few people remain in the theater to hear this music.

Composing with Synths vs. Pencil and Paper

There are two distinct approaches to actually writing the score; one school writes on a synthesizer and sequences the music, the other prefers writing with a pencil and paper. Both methods have adherents who have achieved great success, and there are those who practice both, depending on the kind of score required.

The pencil and paper method has the advantage of giving the composer a slow-motion experience of every note and every chord. There are no "happy accidents" where the hand just seems to find a particular voicing. This method forces the brain to consider every note and its placement because notes need to be specified one at a time. In addition, writing with pencil and paper requires a certain expertise and experience in being able to imagine the music and to hear what it will eventually sound like even though it is just dots and lines on a piece of paper.

The main advantage of using a sequencer is that it can be faster. A composer can play his ideas, or play along to the video, and it is instantly recorded and notated. A transcriber can clean up the output from the sequencer and then give it to an orchestrator. So the composer can really churn out the music in a short amount of time, especially if he has a team of people helping.

For every composer, the reasons for choosing one method over another differ. Some can write in the traditional way if they want to but because of time pressures they use the sequencing method. Other composers are not as trained in music notation, so it is much easier for them to realize their ideas exclusively from a keyboard.

In addition, sometimes the film itself requires a score with strange textures that can best be designed and sampled at a keyboard, or played by unusual instruments that are layered one over the other. This is

something that you can hire professional players to do, or learn yourself. Mark Mancina has had great success with pure sampling, sampling in combination with live orchestra, and designing sounds with unusual instruments.

Mark Mancina:

> *I was doing documentaries all through the '80s, and because of the budget, everything was done electronically, with MIDI. With the advent of samples, I could create something that sounded pretty good. It became, for some of the movies that I have done, a real advantage. For a movie like* Speed *it had to be done that way. The concept of that score for me was to take orchestral percussion and replace it with metallic and metal sounding percussion, which I sampled and set up specifically for that score using all sorts of tin cans and things. All of a sudden* Speed *became such a huge hit and a big movie that I kind of fell into the "electronic composer" category because I used rhythm and electronic sounds for that score.*
>
> *[Now] I'm very tired of MIDI, and I don't like anything in my scores that isn't played live. I don't like that electronic sound. It has worked on some movies that I've done, but I feel it doesn't work in a lot of movies, although now I hear it done a lot.*

As you have seen, there is never only one solution to a creative problem, and every composer has his own viewpoint and method of working. There are many variations on the same theme. When writing a score with many cues, there is a lot to consider. Some composers plan every cue for thematic content and key center. Some create as they go, and their basic musicianship enables them to make a unified musical statement as the movie unfolds. Whether you plan everything out or do it on the fly, understanding how the music functions in any situation is crucial to creating a successful score.

You may be wondering, "Once I've got my dramatic concept, how do I start writing?" Which notes to put on paper, on your sequencer, or on your hard disc recorder is something that cannot be taught, much less

talked about in a book. It will be the sum of your musical *and* personal experience—your ability as a player, how much music you have absorbed over the years through listening and study, your musical philosophy, your life experience, and your personal outlook on life. No one can dictate taste and musical choices; that is what gives every composer a unique musical expression. The way to find yours is by doing it—by writing scores, playing gigs, listening, studying, making choices along the way, and learning what works for you.

CHAPTER 15

Syncing the Music to Picture

Scoring sessions are the greatest thing in making movies because the film is ... cut by then.... It's the first time you can sit back and watch the picture come together.[1]
—*Stuart Baird*

Like many technologies in today's modern digital world, the methods available to a composer for synchronizing music to picture are expanding. Traditionally, the composer waited to receive timing notes from the music editor before beginning to write individual cues. However, with today's computer technology, it is possible to score an entire film without ever creating any timing notes, and still sync the music to the picture. In fact, this is how many composers work, especially those that write directly into a sequencer. This chapter discusses the various methods of syncing, beginning with the traditional way of using timing notes. First it is necessary to understand some basic mathematical ratios and terminology of film and music:

Frame
A film is actually a strip of thousands of photographs passing through a lens, giving the illusion of movement. Each of these individual "photos" is called a frame.

24 frames per second
The speed that 16- and 35-millimeter film (most feature films) run through the projector.

30 frames per second
The speed that something originally shot in video will run through the VCR (in the United States).

Two to four frames

The amount of error that the human eye can see if the music is out of sync. Remember those old black and white "B" movies where the actors' mouths and the actual words are out of sync? This could be a differential of as little as two frames for the viewer to discern the difference. Converted to seconds, two frames equals $^1/_{12}$ or .08 seconds. In terms of time, that is a tiny fraction of a second. But the eye, ear, and brain are fast and can pick up that small of a difference.

Sync point

A place in the action that a composer wants to accent. This can be the end of a line of dialogue, a cut from scene to scene, or a piece of physical action like a fight, a chase, or a kiss. (A sync point is also called a hit, the place where the music "hits" a certain piece of action or a cut.)

No matter which synchronization method is used, the first thing for a composer to do is view the cue several times. The most important thing at this point is to *get a feel for the tempo of the cue.* Often, the on-screen drama suggests certain rhythms, and the way the different shots have been edited together suggests a certain pacing. Sometimes the music goes against action on-screen. For example, there could be a chase scene where the music moves very slowly for a dramatic reason. Whatever the conclusion, the tempo of the music must be established before writing can begin.

Once an approximate tempo is reached, the composer decides where there should be sync points, if any. Reference to the spotting notes and any decisions or requests from the director are noted, and the composer arrives at a general musical concept for the cue. Some cues have no sync points, and the music just "washes" through the action, creating an overall mood or feel. Others, especially action cues, can have many sync points. When the music mimics the action exactly, it is called *mickey-mousing,* coming from the old cartoons when the music followed the action almost beat by beat (this term is used whether it happens in cartoons or not).

The timing of sync points can also be determined from the *window burn*—a rectangular box on the screen of the work print that shows the reel, minutes, seconds, and either hundreths of a second or frame numbers. This is actually a visual representation of the SMPTE time code used to lock up the video equipment to the audio.

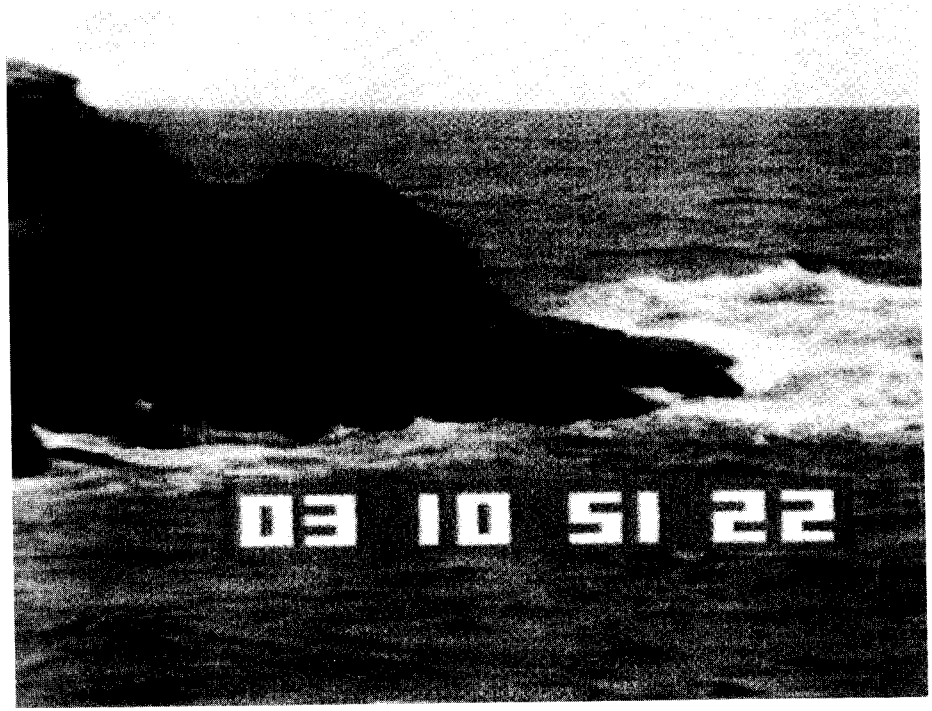

Fig. 15.1. Window Burn.

Once the composer determines the sync points, he figures out how to tailor the music so that these sync points come at logical places in the music, often at downbeats.

Then the composer decides which method of synchronization to use—click track, clock, or punches and streamers. If a cue has a lot of sync points, or if the music is fast and rhythmically difficult, then a click track would be appropriate. If the music calls for rubato and

expressive passages, then punches and streamers or clock allow that kind of interpretation. If the cue is short, or if there are no sync points that need accurate timing, then the clock would be appropriate.

Punches And Streamers

In the early days of sound films, it was apparent that a technique needed to be developed where the composer/conductor could manipulate the music to synchronize exactly with the film. The first method that was developed was that of *punches and streamers*. It was realized that once the composer decided the exact timing of where he wanted a musical hit, at the recording session that exact frame could be anticipated and the music synchronized to it. The way this worked was that the music editor would literally punch a hole in that particular frame (of the work print, not the negative) so that when the film passed through the projector, that frame would come out as a flash of light instead of a visual image. But that flash, or punch, needed to have a preparation. So a system was developed where the music editor would literally scrape a line (a streamer) on the film for a certain length, usually 3, 4, or 5 feet, which equals 2, 2⅔, and 3⅓ seconds. The conductor would then see a vertical line move across the screen from right to left, ending in a flash of light at the exact frame with which the music should synchronize. (See Fig. 15.2. Punches and Streamers.)

When using punches and streamers, there are often *reference punches*, also known as *flutter punches*. These are punches that show the conductor if he is going too fast or too slow. They are often placed at every bar, or every other bar, as tempo guideposts. Before computers, a music editor would find the frame of film in which a composer wanted to see a flutter punch, and punch a hole in every other frame of a five-frame sequence. The appearance on the screen when these five frames go through the projector is of a "flutter" of light. These reference punches are not meant to be hard and fast sync points; they are simply guideposts telling the conductor to speed up or slow down a bit.

Today, the music editor no longer has to manually punch holes and prepare the actual film; punches and streamers are generated by computer programs such as *Auricle*. This is a great advantage, for in the old

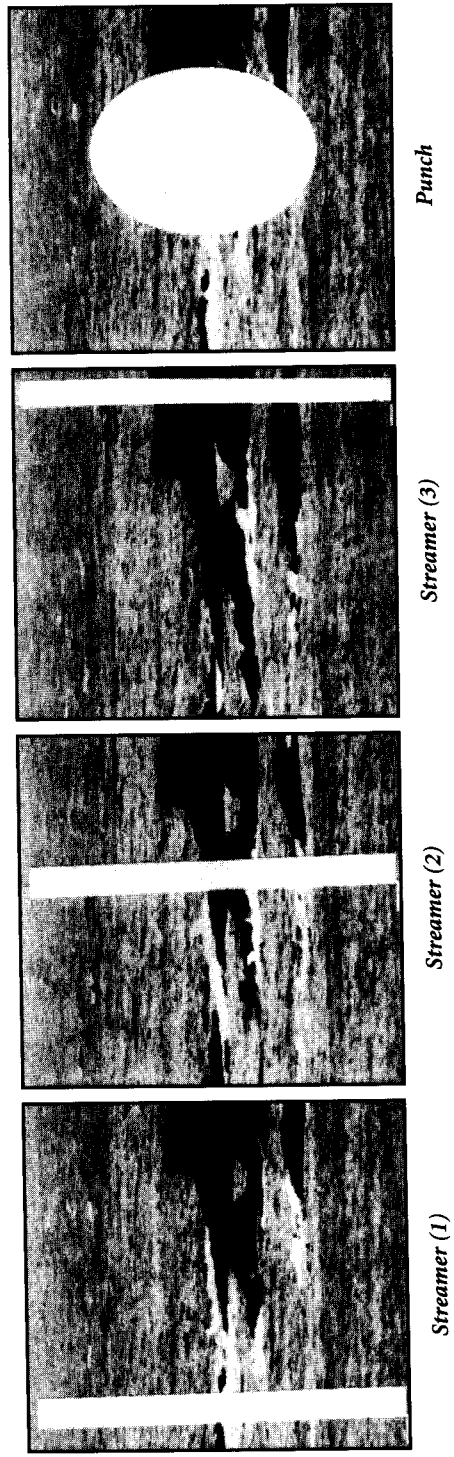

Fig. 15.2. Punches and Streamers.

days, if a change in the music was requested after the punches and streamers were prepared, it could not be done right away, on the spot. The composer and music editor would have to redo the cue, often that night, and record it at another session. With a computer generating punches and streamers, it is possible to make extensive changes on the spot, as long as the composer is able to shift things musically and the music editor is skilled at programming the software.

Using punches and streamers is actually a very accurate method of synchronization, if the conductor is skilled. The advantages of conducting to punches and streamers are that the music can be very flexible and expressive because it is not locked to a metronome, or click track. Also, the conductor sees the film, so he can react to it. The disadvantages are that the technology is not always available, and that if there are a lot of sync points, if the music is fast and difficult rhythmically, or if there are many tempo changes, punches and streamers do not serve the music well.

Click Track

A *click track* provides the tempo the conductor and musicians hear during a recording. Whereas metronome markings are measured in *beats per minute* (BPM), traditionally, film click tracks have been measured in *frames per beat* (FPB). This enables precise synchronization of the music to the film.

Today, computers enable click tracks to be generated in either format, but for many years composers indicated click tempos in their score, marked as pairs of numbers: 24-0, 12-7, 18-3. This has its origins from the early days of film, before the age of computers, when music editors created click tracks by punching holes in loops of film. The hole would pass over the projector's optical sound head and cause a pop, or "click," at a regular interval determined by the length of the loop.

The two numbers represent how many frames, and divisions of the frame, at which the hole would be punched. Since film runs at 24 frames per second, 24-0 FPB indicates a tempo of one beat every 24 frames (one hole punched every 24 frames), or one beat per second (corresponding to a traditional metronome marking of mm=60 BPM). Lower numbers indicate faster tempos. The indication 12-0 FPB means two beats per second, or mm=120. The loop of film was shorter and the punched holes moved through the projector with greater frequency, causing a faster click.

The second click-track number is a very small measurement. Composers and music editors realized early on that smaller increments than one whole frame were necessary, so they used the film's sprocket holes as guides for smaller subdivisions. There are four sprocket holes in each frame of film (see Fig. 10.1.), and a hole could be punched at one of these holes or in between them. This gave eight possible increments of click track tempo for each frame. If a composer wanted a tempo slightly faster than 60 beats per minute, instead of punching a hole every 24 frames for a 24-0 click, he might try 23-7, 23-6, or 23-5.

The human ear can't distinguish measurements that small, and short cues of just a few seconds don't require such precision. However, on cues lasting several minutes, these fractions add up, and the difference can mean hitting or missing an action on-screen at the end of the cue.

There are several mathematical formulas that can be used for finding a click tempo in frames per beat; these were used in the early days of film. Also, *click track books* list the timing on every beat at dozens of possible tempos.

In the 1950s a device called the Urei Digital Metronome was developed. This electronic metronome ended the need for film loops running through a synchronized projector, for it could generate any FPB click tempo electronically with the simple turn of a dial.

Nowadays, computers and sequencers are also used to find and generate click tracks. These easily express tempo markings in FPB and in BPM, which are now also divisible into tiny increments.

A click track is best used when the tempo is constant, when it is very fast, when the music is rhythmically complex, or when there are many sync points to catch. Some cues require a *variable click track.* This is

the same as a regular click track, only there are one or more tempo changes. These tempo changes can begin immediately at a new bar line, or can be prepared with warning clicks if the musicians are holding a long note or fermata. There can also be "ramps," or gradual accellerandos or ritardandos in the music. Some composers us very slight variations of click from measure to measure in order to make it sound more "real" and less mechanical. At the recording session, the music editor will have programmed the computer with the proper tempo changes, and monitors this process to ensure that the synchronization is accurate.

Clock

Another method of syncing music to film is the use of a *stopclock*, now simply called a *clock*. In this case, the conductor watches a large analog clock with a sweep hand (basically a large stopwatch about 12 inches in diameter). Using the clock method gives some flexibility in the music, but realistically, it is accurate for sync points only to plus or minus a third of a second. When using the clock, the music editor's job is fairly easy; he just has to know where the music is beginning and ending, and make sure that the conductor is accurate.

Wild

There is one final way of recording a cue, and that is called recording *wild*. This is not when all the musicians go to the studio commissary and party down; it refers to recording without any kind of synchronization reference. A cue is recorded without clicks, punches and streamers, or the use of a clock. The music editor is then responsible for seeing that it is cut into the film at the proper point. This method is often used for very short cues, or cues where changes have been made at the recording studio and the previously prepared synchronization method is no longer valid. If the cue is longer than a few seconds, its success will depend on the skills of the conductor.

There are distinct advantages and disadvantages to each synchronization method:

Punches and streamers are great if the music needs to be free, flexible, or rubato. They are fun to conduct to! They can make your sync points accurate to the desired frame. They can facilitate tempo changes and be effective in any music where there are a lot of holds or fermatas. The disadvantages are they are difficult to use if the music is very fast, rhythmically complex, or has a lot of sync points. The effectiveness of punches and streamers depends on the ability of the conductor. Computers with software that can generate punches and streamers are not available in some studios.

Click tracks are great if you have a lot of sync points or if your music is fast or rhythmically difficult. They can give you spot-on accuracy in making sync points and can assist the players in staying together when there are difficult rhythmic patterns. A variable click track can give very secure tempo changes. The disadvantage to clicks is that they become robotic with a stiff and unmusical pulse. One way around this stiffness is for the studio to send the click into the headphones of the conductor, but not the musicians. This can improve the feel a bit.

Recording to clock is good for having flexibility in the music. It is a desirable method when punches and streamers are not available. It is good for shorter cues that don't require a lot of drama, like going to commercial in a TV show. The disadvantage is that using the clock is the least accurate of all the methods, so if you have any sync points that need to be dead-on, this method is not preferred. Using the clock is accurate to about one third of a second, or eight frames. Remember the rule of thumb that the human eye/ear connection can determine a differential of two to four frames.

Sequencing

Many composers do not use timing notes in the traditional way; they prefer to just play along with the video on a keyboard until they get an idea that they like. Sometimes they establish a specific click in advance because they know where they want to hit the action. But more often than not, they play without a tempo reference and sequence their ideas. If the sequence is going to be orchestrated and eventually recorded live, it then can fall to a music editor, or a composer's assis-

tant, to construct a click track for the musicians to play along to at the recording session. This can be painstaking, and often results in the use of a variable click because of the natural variations of tempo that occur during live playing of the sequence. Most good sequencing programs allow the composers to "tweak" a sequence and move the tempo around; if the composer is a few frames early or late on a specific hit, that moment can be moved to be more exact. However, if a click is used while the composer is sequencing, that is easiest for the music editor, for it keeps the composer's tempo "honest."

Note that if a sequence is the final music for the project, then all of this is fairly straight-forward. All you must do is correctly edit and align the sequence to the places you want to hit. But if you are using the sequence as a mock-up of the cue, as a sketch, or as a way of generating some initial ideas, and the sequence is going to be orchestrated and then played live, then the process can be complicated. It may require a team of people: music editor, MIDI transcriber, and orchestrator.

Music editor Eric Reasoner describes working with composers who sequence, as well as those who use timing notes to prepare their score:

> *There are a couple different modes of working. Some composers play stuff into a keyboard and sequencer while locked to picture. That's one mode of working, and that MIDI file then has to be deciphered. A click has to be laid up against what was played if the composer wasn't listening to a click, which happens a lot of times. They just play to picture, and then you have to figure out a click track so that they hit particular musical events where they want to on the picture.*
>
> *The other way is where the composer takes the timing notes that you've provided for them and utilizes that information. They do the math, they figure out how many bars, beats, and clicks. They figure out tempos, and lay out their score based upon that information. Then I see the score later and basically line it up with the picture. "Lining it up" means I create the click track and the streamers and punches after the score is written, according to what timings I see above what measures, and what instructions are given. And that's relatively simple and fast, because they've taken care of it.*

Once you choose your method of synchronization, you are ready to set up the score. Whether putting pencil to paper or sequencing, it is a good idea to lay out the entire score, locate all the sync points, and know whether any meters need to be adjusted, before beginning to write.

In beginning this composing process, several things must happen. First, watch the scene many times. Have a strong idea in your mind of what you want to say with the music. Should it be funny or should it heighten tension? Should it be somewhat neutral, or melodramatic? The mood or the emotion you want to express will suggest a tempo. Remember that the composer's role is to help move the story forward. It is of the utmost importance that you know why the music is in a certain scene, and what it is supposed to accomplish. Then your writing will be focused and appropriate dramatically.

CHAPTER 16

Television

The early television years were indispensable.
That was my learning process.
—Jerry Goldsmith[1]

Music for television is conceptually the same as music for feature films in that it underscores dramatic situations. However, the process of writing music for television, the scope of the music, and the sound of the music itself is often very different. The way television shows are produced leads to a very different use of music. In television, production schedules are tighter, budgets are much smaller, and live ensembles are smaller. There are commercial breaks to consider, and the look and feel of the shows is very different from features. Despite the differences in production, a composer must still write music that is dramatically appropriate and meets the requirements of the production team.

There are several different kinds of television shows and each one has different musical requirements. There are episodic series, TV movies, sports shows, news shows, documentaries, TV magazines, and daytime soap operas; each of these has a different need for music. There are commercials and network logos. Some shows use only synthesizers and samples, some use a live rhythm section, some use a live orchestra. There are those that are hip-hop, light rock, metal, or traditional orchestral in style.

This chapter is concerned with episodic series and TV movies—the shows with dramatic music. An *episodic series* (one that has a new show every week) can be a drama like *E.R. or NYPD Blue*; a comedy like *Seinfeld,* or an animated comedy or dramatic series like *The Simpsons* or *Superman.*

The evolution of an episodic television show is similar to that of a film; the idea must be generated, and a producer and a network must be found. A *pilot* is then made, and usually aired in the late spring or summer. The pilot is a single trial episode that gauges the response of the audience. If the pilot is well received, then the network may agree to a whole season, and the show is on its way.

Today there are only a handful of episodic shows that use a live studio orchestra. Because the budgets are smaller, if an orchestra is used, there are many less players than in the orchestra for a feature film. A typical television studio orchestra for a weekly show ranges from 20 to 35 players. (TV movies might use more.) Compare this to the orchestra used for feature films—usually 50 to 100 players or more. This is fitting because the scope of television is smaller in production value, as well as in the sheer size of the screen and audio speakers.

Schedules

When a show is contracted by a network, it is typically for 22 new episodes a year, running from about late September to May. The rest of the year is filled with reruns or alternative programming such as movies or news specials. (When a weekly show is bumped for a special movie or news show, it is said to be "preempted.") Production of these episodes usually takes place between late July and the end of April, with the period in between, May through July, referred to as "hiatus." It is during this time that production is "down" and many people take vacations. This is also the time when pilots are often produced.

Once a show starts weekly production and the first episode has been edited, the composer starts to work on the underscore. From this point on, the schedules are very demanding, for the turn-around is fast. Since new episodes are aired every week, the composer has very little time to write the music; every week a new episode rolls down the post-production assembly line and lands at his front door, ready for scoring.

An important production difference between films and television is that in television the director's role is somewhat diminished. Once the shooting is completed, the director's job is often finished. In television, the director is not involved in post-production, so the person that the composer communicates with is usually the producer or assistant producer.

Once receiving the final work-print of the show, the composer may have to spot, compose, and record anywhere from 10 to 30 minutes of music in a matter of days. And this is not a one-shot deal; he could be on a schedule that requires that much music every week, or every other week. If the composer is writing for a live orchestra, then this schedule gets even more compressed, for the music preparation pipeline of orchestrating and copying parts needs some time. If the composer is sequencing and doing the music electronically, then this kind of schedule is a little easier, but still grueling. In fact, some shows have multiple composers who rotate episodes every two or three weeks. When really in a jam, a composer will sometimes call a colleague to ghostwrite some of the music. This is when the main composer gets the screen credit, but others help by writing one or more cues. (Note: ghostwriting also occurs in features.)

Composer Shirley Walker mostly uses live musicians. She describes working under the pressure associated with a weekly series:

> *The problem with a weekly show is that at a certain point it catches up with you because the schedule is crazy; every week you're turning out a show. Now, it doesn't go like that over the whole season because they plan hiatuses and preemptions and things like that. But inevitably you're going to have a three- or four-week span that hits you several times during the course of the 22 episodes where every week you have to be finishing a show. So you might start out on your first episode, and you've got three weeks, and then your second one you might have two weeks, and then pretty soon the weight of that whole thing is a snowball effect that starts really pounding you and pushing you from behind until every week you have to have finish anywhere from 25 to 45 minutes of music.*

For *X-Files*, Mark Snow composes all of the music electronically, only occasionally bringing in a live musician to his home studio. He usually

has 20 to 30 minutes of music in every episode. In addition to scoring *X-Files*, he also writes for *Millennium*, which requires another 20 to 30 minutes per week. This enormous amount of music is possible only because the music is done electronically:

> *For* X-Files *I get about a week, seven days, but if I have to crunch it, I can do it in three days. If I get the episode on a Monday, I can have it ready for a Friday, which is when the producers come over to the house, listen to the music with the picture, and make their comments.*
>
> *The way I can do the two shows at once is because they usually, for some lucky reason, come at different times. Let's say they're done in the same week, I'd have three days on one, three days on another; it's doable. I'm used to the shows, I know the sounds and the textures and it's not about starting from scratch and walking around the house for days thinking, coming up with a theme or a palette of sounds. It's pretty easy.*
>
> *I can go much faster than if I had to record with a TV orchestra. That would absolutely be out of the question. What I'd have to do then is have someone do a takedown, or send MIDI files to the copyists, have them copy the parts, assemble the orchestra, go to the session. It would just be impossible.*

Alf Clausen does the music for *The Simpsons* with a live studio orchestra of about 35 players. His typical schedule is like this:

> *When we're on a week-to-week schedule, what I will normally do is spot an episode on Friday afternoon. The music editor will prepare my timing notes on Saturday and Sunday and then I'll start writing, usually Monday morning if it's a normal episode of 30 cues or less. If it's more than that, I'll sometimes start on Sunday to get a jump on things and then I'll put in probably four long days—Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday— maybe nine in the morning until 11:30 or midnight every day. Then we spot the next week's episode Friday afternoon, and on Friday night starting at seven I'll record the cues that I've composed during the past week. We usually have anywhere from a three to a three-and-a-half hour recording session to do those 30 cues. Every week is different on* The Simpsons, *as you know. It really is dependent on whether it's straight underscore type of recording that I have to do or if I have to record vocals and do orchestral sweeteners of songs that I've written and already recorded. So it's never a dull moment.*

Main Titles

The beginning part of the show where the opening credits are shown is called the *main title*, a term that is borrowed from feature films. The music for this opening is also called the main title by the music production team—a shortening of the phrase "main title music." For the television main title, the composer usually writes some kind of theme, or catchy music with a distinct *hook*. ("Hook" is a pop-song term that refers to the one most memorable lyric, melodic phrase, or part of the arrangement.) Actually, the composer of the main title is often different from the composer of the underscore on the weekly episodes. This is true especially if the main title music is a song with lyrics.

For television, main titles are short—typically anywhere from 45 to 90 seconds—as opposed to feature films, where they can be three or four minutes long. In this amount of time, a strong statement about the show must be made that hopefully will be memorable. It is not enough time to develop a musical idea; any ideas presented should be concise and easily accessible to the audience.

Act-In/Act-Out

Every segment of a television show or TV movie, from commercial break to commercial break, is called an *act*. An act can be anywhere from 20 minutes long (the first act of a TV movie) to as short as five or six minutes. Often a composer is required to write a short cue, called an *act-in* or *act-out*, that brings us into the show after a commercial, or takes us out to a commercial. In the early days of TV, these transitions were used all the time. Today they are not automatic; their use depends on the show and the dramatic situation. Sometimes the theme for the

show is used, sometimes new musical material is introduced. An act-in or act-out can be as short as a few seconds, or it can be an extended cue. The important thing is that the act-in or act-out reflect the nature of the show and the story line.

Related to the act-in and act-out are the use of short bridges or transitions. A *bridge* is a music cue, usually of just a few seconds, that connects the story when it moves to another location or forward in time. This usually involves a cut or a dissolve to a new scene. Again, this is more typical of older dramatic shows, but is still used today in many comedies as well as dramas. The slap bass in *Seinfeld* is a typical use of music for both a bridge as well as act-in and act-out.

There are dozens of TV shows every week that use music, while there are fewer theatrical movies. There is a lot of opportunity for composers in television, and many top-notch composers are currently writing for television. There are also many composers now writing exclusively for features who got their start in television, including Jerry Goldsmith, John Williams, and Alan Silvestri. In addition, television can sometimes be more lucrative for composers than feature films because the royalty payments compound when a show is aired and then goes into reruns. If a composer has shows airing on network TV, reruns on local stations and cable, the royalties add up quickly. (See chapter 22 for an in-depth discussion of royalties.)

Some of the most popular shows on television are animated series, such as *The Simpsons, Batman, Superman, Rug Rats,* and *Teletubbies.* Although many of the compositional and scoring techniques are the same for animation as for live action television, there are also many differences. Such considerations are discussed in chapter 18, "Animation."

CHAPTER 17

Ethnic and Period Music

Motion picture art is different. It is realistic and factual. It not only tries to capture the spirit of bygone eras, but it also tries to make believe that it projects before the eyes of the spectator the real thing.
—Miklos Rozsa[1]

Los Angeles is the entertainment capital of the world. And because so many films are produced there, or in New York, their locale is often set in these places. However, every year there are also countless films where the story, or part of the story, takes place in other locations. These can be exotic and unusual locations anywhere on the planet, such as Nepal, Congo, or backwoods Montana. Or they can be large urban centers of the United States or Europe. Some of these locations have music that is instantly associated with them, some do not, and the use of music to suggest a locale will be different from composer to composer, and director to director. The task is finding and creating music that helps reflect the feeling of the location while being effective dramatically.

In addition, sometimes there is the need to create a score for a period film that takes place in historical Europe or America. This presents its own set of problems, but the basic question, how to reflect the time period while being appropriate dramatically, remains the same.

This discussion necessarily takes place from an ethnocentric viewpoint. In the world of film making, we are often dealing with a situation where Hollywood is looking out at the rest of the world. The philosophy is, "Everybody else is different, and those of us here in Los Angeles are the norm." This is actually true for any culture or country—we see the world through our own prescription glasses. Therefore, for the purposes of this book, I refer to "ethnic music" as that which is not Western Classical or popular music. So with apologies

to readers from anywhere other than the United States, or Los Angeles in particular, let's look at how to approach "ethnic music," as well as music that describes a different European or American era.

Ethnic Music

Hollywood's approach to ethnic music has changed over the years. This is largely due to changes in film making itself, and to the shrinking "global village"—the fact that all corners of the planet are closer together due to ease of travel and the information technology that connects us.

Films have become much more "real" over the past decades. In the old films, killing was often an off-screen event, and blood was minimized. Cowboys wore fancy, fringed costumes and carried pearl-handled Colt 45s; they were always clean looking and freshly shaved. Today's cowboys are likely as not to be grungy, slightly ragged-looking and dirty, and if they kill someone, the blood flows bright red and freely. Probably this is closer to what it was really like. We not only see more "real" costumes, blood, gore, and violence in modern films, we also see more real emotions as well as special effects. Many films of past decades look dated to us; the younger generations often snicker at the "old" films. So the question becomes: Does the music also need to reflect a realism, and if so, to what degree?

This question has been answered in many different ways over the years, and part of the answer lies in the development of popular music. As popular music has become more sophisticated, the ears of its audience have developed in parallel. In the 1930s and '40s the audience was musically sophisticated when it came to Wagner, Brahms, Puccini, Duke Ellington, or Tommy Dorsey, but they were naive when it came to the music of other cultures. Today we have become more familiar with the many kinds of music heard in other countries; our global village shares resources, ideas, and technology. The composer must take more care in the way a country is represented musically.

There is also a psychological dimension of this process. We associate certain instruments with certain cultures, depending on our own experience. A mandolin played a specific way is definitely Italy; Flamenco style guitar can only be Spain. A banjo is the mountains or the Old South of the United States. But what about accordion, which is used in many countries? Or pan flute, which can be associated with Eastern Europe or South America? The composer must take care when designing a score with certain sounds that it is really suggesting the place he intends. There is no way to please everyone because different people have different musical associations. However, one way to make sure the music is accurate is to do research.

Research

When writing for a film that requires ethnic music, composers often do research. This can be done in many ways. It can be as simple as buying some CDs, or it can be as complex as spending time in a music library and corresponding with experts all over the world. The important thing is that the composer become familiar enough with the style of the music that he can create it in a way that is convincing dramatically. Oftentimes, he will just use one element of it, like a particular instrument blended in with an orchestra, or a scale derived from that culture. An ensemble of musicians from that country or culture can be used as a separate scoring entity, or it can be blended with the orchestra.

John Williams does this in the film, *Far and Away*, which follows the journey of an Irish couple from Ireland to the United States in the 1890s. Williams uses two Irish-derived melodies as the main themes; they are first heard in the main title, one played on pennywhistle, the other on pan flute. Both are accompanied by a symphonic orchestra. The effect is to achieve a "flavor" of the Irish location and characters, but not actually to be traditional Irish music. However, he also has scenes that are scored exclusively by The Chieftains, one of Ireland's premier groups that performs traditional Irish music. The Chieftains are often not accompanied by the orchestra, but because of the Irish nature of the orchestral sections, there is still continuity between the various kinds of textures.

One composer known for his love of musicology and investigating the music of other cultures was Miklos Rozsa. During the 1940s, '50s, and '60s, Rozsa wrote many scores, such as *El Cid, Ben-Hur, Quo Vadis*, and

Ivanhoe, where he researched the music of the time and place, and incorporated it into his score. He was meticulous and immersed himself into the study of the music of the culture. For example, for the score to *El Cid,* he journeyed to Spain and studied with authorities on medieval Spanish and Moorish music. For *Quo Vadis,* he did a thorough investigation of Roman music and instruments.

Unfortunately, because of post-production schedules, composers today rarely have time for such efforts. However, research can be a valuable tool in enhancing the kinds of sounds and textures available to the composer. The deeper one gets into the music of another culture, the more it can be reflected in the original music for a film. Sometimes hours and hours can be spent researching, studying, and listening to the music of another culture, but very little specific music from that place is used in the score. But after this process, no matter how much ethnic music is used, the composer has an understanding, sometimes on a subconscious level, of the music he studied, which then comes through in his own music.

Cliff Eidelman speaks of the value of researching the music before beginning to write *Triumph of the Spirit,* a powerful 1989 film about Greek Jews in a Nazi concentration camp:

> *I went to the UCLA musicology department and I started listening to recordings of Sephardic Jewish folk music. Primarily pre-war music from Greece and Spain. As it turned out, a lot of what I was hearing was stuff that felt very second nature to me. I really connected to the kinds of feelings that were in that music. They were using mandolins, mandolas, a lot of tambourines, guitars, and drums. There was a certain raw feeling to it, but it was very warm.*
>
> *Then I read the script and started coming up with ideas. I wanted to incorporate some of those Eastern instruments into a Western orchestral setting. I took the liberty of adding an Indian instrument, the tamboura, which isn't a Sephardic Jewish instrument, but I liked the droning quality and I thought it was a nice color. Then I discovered quickly that the language they were speaking was Ladino, or at least a big part of what they were speaking was Ladino, which is a combination of Spanish and Hebrew and is essentially extinct today. When I realized I wanted to use a choir, I chose Ladino as the language for the text. In addition to that, I didn't want to use preexisting poems, I wanted to have poems written that were really more specific to the emotional context of what was going on in those scenes. I found a cantor who knew Ladino really well, and he was also a very good poet. I described the emotion, and he wrote poetry based on it. He translated the poems into Ladino, and that became the text for the score.*

This story illustrates the kinds of research a composer can do in order to draw upon ethnic musical influences. Notice that Eidelman did not attempt to recreate the music of the Greek Jews; he simply tried to capture the feeling, even to the point of using an archaic language to represent the emotions of the film. Also, just for color, he used a tamboura, which has nothing to do with European Jews. This shows the creative license one can take. It is also interesting that no one outside a few people involved in the film would know that the language being sung was Ladino. But Eidelman and the director felt that the emotional content of this language would somehow transmit part of the experience of the people portrayed in the film. This is a subtle idea, yet one with a specific, if subconscious intent. Many composers and film makers rely on such subtleties to help complete the story.

Sometimes composers use ethnic instruments but inadvertently imply a different culture from the one in the film. This can happen for several reasons, not the least of which is the subjective nature of the audience's musical associations. An example of a film that reflects the exotic location, but perhaps inadvertently implies yet a second or even third different culture, is *Beyond Rangoon.* In this film Hans Zimmer uses a sampled ethnic sound reminiscent of Balinese gamelan, but also reflects instruments in the culture of Burma (now known as Myanmar), where the movie takes place. However, over the top of the texture that is glued together by this gamelan sound is a high wooden-flute sound. Many people who have heard this sound immediately associate it with Ireland, because the high flute sounds Irish in nature

to them. However, upon hearing the music and seeing the picture, they concede that it works, that with the visuals of the Burmese countryside and rivers the ethnic association with Southeast Asia comes together, "Irish" flavor or not. This shows the power of combining the sound with images. When the music is isolated, one impression is conveyed. When it is married to the picture, a whole different set of associations can be conjured.

This illustrates the difficulty of writing ethnic music for a mass audience. It can be constructed in many different ways depending on the creative directions of the composer and the director, and it can be interpreted differently depending on the audience. The composer needs to have firmly in his mind how "real" the ethnic music needs to be. Does it need to be like source music, i.e., very real? Or can it just imply the culture? Sometimes the budget of the project determines how real the music gets. Bill Ross used ethnic music in *The Amazing Panda Adventure*, as well as on the television series *MacGyver*:

> The Amazing Panda Adventure *was set in China. [Director] Chris Cane wasn't sure what he wanted, so after thinking about it, I came up with the idea for this mellow Western approach with a kind of Chinese vibe. I did what I could to educate myself about some of the Chinese instruments, and wove them throughout with the Western-style orchestra. There were four cues where I wrote Chinese music as source music.*
>
> *In* MacGyver, *we used some ethnic instruments, but we didn't research them. There was no time and no budget to focus it in any more than a very general way. After a while it came down to large geographical distinctions—East or West, Europe, etc.—and a small group of corresponding instruments. The fortunate thing for a film—like* The Amazing Panda Adventure*—as opposed to television, is that you can afford to have the recording environment and the musicians to do what's necessary.*

Having the budget to do what is necessary is paramount. Hiring extra musicians who play specialized instruments can be expensive. Sometimes composers must make do with samples. But either way, the creative decision is to decide how much of the ethnic flavor is wanted. Most of the time, composers choose to incorporate ethnic instruments with the full palette of orchestral sounds available. This seems to be a solution that is pleasing to the ear of the modern audience, dramatically satisfying, and suggests psychological associations with certain cultures. It can mean simply adding one instrument like panpipes or koto, or a hint of a particular scale, or it can mean using a whole ensemble of ethnic musicians. A combination of research, good dramatic discrimination, and clear communications with the director usually provides the answer.

Period Western Music

Writing music for a film that takes place in historical Europe or America has always presented a problem for scoring. The question here is similar to the question regarding ethnic scoring: should the music reflect the time period? And the answer is also similar: it depends on the vision of the director and composer. More often than not, that vision is a combination of older, period sounds, and contemporary orchestra. The reason for this is the same as with ethnic music: audiences can most easily identify with a contemporary orchestra, yet a certain amount of realism is sometimes appropriate. An excellent example of this is *Anne of the Thousand Days*, with a score by Georges Delerue. In this score, shawms and other period instruments are blended with the orchestra.

Often, in both period and ethnic scores, realism can be achieved through the use of source music. Source music and underscore can often be combined and blended together to make a dramatically and musically satisfying effect. For example, in *Shakespeare in Love*, there are several instances where we hear 16th century source music, and then the underscore played by a modern orchestra actually grows out of the source music, eventually taking over. In *Shining Through*, a film about undercover spying in World War II, there is a scene at a party where the Glenn Miller arrangement of "Moonlight Serenade" is playing. Composer Michael Kamen effectively extends this '40s song by segueing to the underscore with a love theme that is thoroughly

modern in sonority. These examples work because we accept the source music as representing the time period, and the orchestra as representing the dramatic situation.

Another example of a score that uses both period music as well as contemporary music as underscore is *Dangerous Liaisons*. In this film, which takes place amongst the aristocracy in 18th century Paris, George Fenton has constructed two distinct musical ideas that serve the drama well. In the main title, the first thing heard is a contemporary orchestra playing a very dramatic, tense and restless theme with a modern musical vocabulary. Then it segues to a harpsichord and a smaller Baroque sounding orchestra. These two contrasting sonorities provide ample material throughout the film; one reminds us of the time and place, the other is used in the more melodramatic moments.

The important concept in scoring ethnic or period films is to have a clear idea of how much of that music is necessary. This often depends on the director's vision, such as Francis Ford Coppola with *The Rainmaker* (see chapter 9). These situations call for the composer to find a solution that suggests time and place, and addresses dramatic needs.

This kind of scoring highlights what is essentially the psychology of combining music and visuals. Because the music addresses both visual and dramatic situations, the audience's attention is split. Their eyes must take in the picture, their ears take in the music. Composers are actually addressing this phenomenon every time they write a cue for any kind of film. The audience is having an experience on several sensory levels as well as several emotional levels. Music is just one part of this, although a big part. In films that use ethnic or period scores, we ask the audience to accept that we are not trying to create "authentic" music of the time or place, but simply add to the color of what they are already seeing. It is more important to be "real" in a visual sense; the music can *imply* the "reality" and still be accepted.

CHAPTER 18

Animation

The art of writing for animation is in keeping the music musical, while hitting what needs to be hit without sounding choppy.
—Richard Stone

There are currently several different kinds of animated films and television shows. There are old-style cartoons, such as *Animaniacs* or *Tiny Toons,* dramatic action-hero animations such as *Batman* or *Superman*, and comedies such as *The Simpsons, South Park, Rug Rats,* and *Teletubbies*. There is also the feature film animated musical such as *Pocahontas, Mulan*, or *Quest for Camelot*. The way the music is handled depends on the project's style, as well as the creative vision of the production team.

Note that films with real actors are referred to as *live-action films*, in order to distinguish them from *animation*, where the characters are drawn.

The Early Days of Animation

As discussed previously, film music styles were very different in the first decades of talkies from what they are today. In the 1930s, the music was likely to hit many pieces of action and comment on almost every emotion the actors showed. When the first cartoons came out, the musical approach was the same, though taken to an extreme. Almost every movement, whether the characters were falling in love or having a knock-down-drag-out fight, was reflected in the music. The term *mickey-mousing* refers to this style where the music mimics every little thing, as in the early Mickey Mouse cartoons.

Two of the most successful composers for cartoons in the early days of film were Scott Bradley, who did most of the *Tom and Jerry* cartoons, and Carl Stalling of Warner Bros. These men set the standard for the

industry. At first, cartoon music was a thrown-together jumble of snatches of different melodies taken from other sources. Both Stalling and Bradley decided that that something different could be done. Bradley describes his thinking:

> *It seemed to me that almost anybody could collect a lot of nursery jingles and fast-moving tunes, throw them together along with slide whistles and various noise makers and call that a cartoon score, but that didn't satisfy me and, I felt sure, wouldn't really satisfy the public. So I set about to work out musical scores that would add significance to the picture, that would be musically sound and would be entertaining.*[1]

So Bradley and Stalling went about finding a way to accompany the cartoons that was musical, interesting, and had integrity. The dilemma facing them (and composers today) was the sheer number of hits—as many as 30 or 40 in a 30-second cue—coupled with the fact that the action of the cartoons was irregular, in terms of musical beats. Somehow, a way had to be found to make the music *seem* regular. Mixed meters were a way to make musical accents come out on downbeats, yet cartoons had so many places where the music needed to hit the action that it was impossible to have every hit on a downbeat. One solution was the creation of a melody line that stretched over an entire sequence, and the hits in the music would be mostly in the accompaniment to the melodic line. This was more elegant than simply stringing together bits of folksongs, nursery tunes, and arias, which tended to sound quite choppy.

In addition to mickey-mousing everything in the early cartoons, and despite the desire to achieve a more musical solution than simply linking familiar melodies, it became a convention to parody familiar pieces of music in a humorous way. This is probably a logical extension of the way well-known tunes were used during the silent film era. For example, sunrise became the "Morning Mood" from Grieg's *Peer Gynt*, and if a character was drunk, something like "How Dry I Am" or "Little Brown Jug" would play. Many classical and popular pieces were quoted or parodied. To score these moments, composers still used the

old silent-film fake books of Rapée or Becce, since these books provided dozens of excerpts of many different kinds of melodies. Books like these are still used as a reference by composers today.

The process for the composer in the early days of cartoons was different from today. Today, the composer receives a rough-cut of the film, the music editor creates timing notes, and the composer writes from the timing notes and the rough-cut. In the early days of animation, the composer often would not even see the film before the music was recorded. After a spotting session with the director, the composer would receive a "detail sheet," also called an "exposure sheet." (Note that the nomenclature varied from studio to studio.) Richard Stone describes the *exposure sheet*, as it was called at Warner Bros.:

> *These sheets laid out the action on paper and were a sort of mini-storyboard. The director would decide, for instance, how fast a character was walking, and would have this very elaborate sheet saying, "Daffy is walking across the street taking a step every eight frames." This information would be copied onto the exposure sheet giving Stalling a description of all the action and the frame measurements of all the action. That is what he wrote to.*

Once the composer had the "frame measurement," it was just a matter of math to figure out the rhythm and timings of these moments. The *exposure sheet* also had music staves below these verbal descriptions so the composer could fill in the sketched music.

Occasionally the composer would receive a "pencil reel" or a "storyboard" of the film. A *pencil reel* is a black and white rough-cut with line drawings as opposed to complete animation. This would be viewed by the composer on a Moviola. A *storyboard* is a series of boxes on a page, like a comic book, that sums up the story and the action and includes timings for each box.

Pencil reels, now called *pencil tests*, and storyboards are still used today. Animators often use line drawings in live-action films to roughly draw a sequence that ultimately gets computer-generated

special effects. Storyboards are used during preproduction in animation, commercials, and occasionally in features.

The composers of the early cartoons were remarkable and often unappreciated. They had fine music skills in composition, orchestration, and conducting, and they were often self-taught. They had an innate sense of drama and what was needed in a film. And, of course, they had a great sense of humor.

Today's animations, except for many of those produced at Warner Bros., are very different. Let's look at the different kinds of contemporary animation one by one.

Warner Bros. Cartoons: The Old Style

In a world of modern computerized animation and musical trends that encompass Aaron Copland and Snoop Doggie Dogg, Warner Bros. has continued to use the musical style originally developed by Carl Stalling in the 1930s. Cartoon series like *Tiny Toons, Animaniacs,* and *The Sylvester & Tweety Mysteries* all use devices that were popular in the '30s, '40s and '50s: traditionally-based orchestras, mickey-mousing action to the smallest detail, and quotes from well-known songs and classical pieces. Creating this kind of show is demanding because the music is constant and there are so many hits. Richard Stone is the supervising composer of most of these Warner Bros. cartoons, and he describes the process:

> *It's like anything else. We still sit with the producer and have a spotting session. In our case, the music is wall to wall; the decisions are not where the music starts and stops, as in a feature film or a live-action television show. In our shows the music never stops. So the question at the spotting session is always about musical style, and what specific things we're going to hit—how loudly and with what instrumentation. We might talk about which public domain tunes we will use....*

> *What we do is an outgrowth of Carl Stalling's style, trying to stay in sync with as many things on screen as we can. Characters walking across the screen with pizzicato celli and a bassoon, if a boulder falls on somebody it will have a piano glissando on it, the xylophone eye-blink, and all the rest of those clichés. We also try to do musical puns with folk songs—PD tunes that we can use. We quote from the classical literature all the time.*

A team of composers works on these shows; typically they rotate and do one show every two weeks. William Ross describes being one of several composers working on episodes for *Tiny Toons:*

> *They were about as hard as anything you want to do. It's like working inside this little tiny box because of the number of hits. Music has seams, let's say, and so the number of seams you have to do in cartoons is a lot. As a composer, I find that most of my time is spent making the seams seamless. Once I get a texture I like, it's easy to continue it for five, six, seven minutes. But every time I have to transition that texture to another one, it takes a lot of thought.*
>
> Tiny Toons *takes that to a whole new level. In the course of a few seconds, you may have ten hits. I know that sounds ridiculous, but there are lots and lots of hits, things you need to address where the music has to do something in these few seconds. So I would have a 30-second cue that had 40 things I had to hit. I tried to limit the number.*
>
> *It was difficult for any of the composers to take on an entire episode and finish it by themselves. It was essentially 19 minutes of music that had to be done in a week or two. It wasn't for the faint of heart. People would be on the floor trying to figure out how to get through this 19 minutes of music. Those that had arranging experience and could manipulate melodies seemed to fair well. I got to where I could do two minutes a day.*

This honest assessment of the difficulty of writing for an old-style cartoon makes one appreciate the work of Stalling and Bradley even

more. That they could crank out enormous amounts of music that worked effectively with the picture, day-in and day-out, shows the high degree of skill they had.

Animated Dramas: Action Heroes

Another type of animation that is very popular is the cartoon or animated drama with an action hero like *Superman* or *Batman*. These television shows or feature films are scored like regular live-action shows. The music does not mickey-mouse every move on screen; rather, it simply tries to support and enhance the visual action.

For animated dramas, the composer receives a work print of the show, and works exactly as he would for a live action show. There is a spotting session, timing notes if needed, and either a synthesized score or live orchestra. Whereas a series like *Tiny Toons* features wall-to-wall music, in an animated drama there is usually less music; it comes in and out as needed.

Animated Dramas: Comedies

One of the most difficult things to decide in any film, live action or animated, is when to be musically funny and when to be musically serious. In the *Tiny Toons* or *Animaniacs* type of show, the choice is obvious: the music must be as goofy as the drama. However, there are many comedies where it is much more effective to have the music be more serious or neutral, and let the comedy routines speak for themselves. *The Simpsons* is a great example of a show where the music does not mimic every piece of action; it simply comments where necessary. Composer Alf Clausen explains the concept:

> *Matt Groening [the producer and creator of* The Simpsons*] and company told me in our first meeting that "It's not a cartoon, it's a drama where the characters are drawn." And when in doubt, he said, score it like a drama, not like a cartoon, not to mickey-mouse everything. Matt was the one who made the request for the acoustic orchestra. He said, "I hate electronics, I think they cheapen the sound. I want the real orchestra."*

> *I have an old friend that came up with the phrase, "You can't vaudeville Vaudeville." That has also served me really well on* The Simpsons. *The producers keep saying, "We don't want the music to comment on the scene. We don't want the music itself to be funny." I'm always in agreement with that; we kind of joke in some of the spotting sessions about how the more serious I can play the music, according to the way the emotion is laid out, the more we pull the audience in and make them think that the situation is real. Then "boom," all of a sudden the gag comes and it becomes twice as funny than it would have if I had tried to set up something leading up to the fact that there was going to be a gag.*

Musicals and Songs

Musicals, whether animated or live action, are extremely complex endeavors, from a production standpoint. The composer of the songs is involved during preproduction and writes the songs based on a script and conversations with the production team. There is a lot of back and forth between the songwriter and the production team regarding the musical feel and the lyrical content of the songs. This can be an efficient process or it can be drawn out, because in preproduction, people feel less pressured and take their time getting the music just how they want it. Finally, after everyone—the producer, director, songwriter—has agreed and signed off on them, the songs are recorded. The animators take the final recording of the song and synchronize the singing and movements of the animated characters. Finally, months, or even years later, when there is a locked version of the film, the underscore is written by either the same composer as the songs or by someone different. David Newman did the underscore to *Anastasia*, and talks about his experience from the composer's perspective:

> *I used all material from the songs because I thought that would be the right artistic choice for the movie. That's what my dad (Alfred Newman) would do with all those musicals, with all those Rodgers and Hammerstein musicals. I really liked that in shows like* Carousel *and* The King and I. *He interwove the score right with the song, and then right out from the song back into the score. I approached* Anastasia *like that, just like it was a tra-*

ditional film. Steve Flaherty and Lynn Ahrens did the songs long before I began the underscore. Taking their themes and developing them in dramatic ways made the movie seem really unified.

Alf Clausen writes both underscore and the songs for *The Simpsons*. His process for these songs is exactly the same as if it were a feature film musical and not a half-hour television series. The songs need to be recorded before the animation is begun, months before the show aired. The process is very complex whenever music is done like this during preproduction, and requires a lot of planning:

The procedure is that normally I am given the script pages that have a lyric already written by one of the writers on staff. Then I'll have a conference with the writer and the producers about what they feel the thrust of the mood of the piece should be, and what the intent should be.

Then, once I've composed the song, I write out the rhythm-section parts, we do a demo of the song, and record the rhythm-section track first. If the song is going to be recorded by cast voices, then I'll record scratch vocals, which are thrown away eventually. They're just used for demo purposes so that we can make cassettes for all the cast members in order to learn the material before they go into the voice-record session. If the songs are not going to be sung by the cast members, and we're going to use our own vocalists, then normally we'll keep the vocals that we've recorded all the way to the end of the process.

The animators then animate to those tracks that are given to them with the rhythm section, the cast voices, and the click track. Nine months later, when the show is finished at the animation house, it comes back to us and hopefully they've left the songs alone and I don't have to do any major surgery.

So when I score the underscore cues for that particular episode, I'll also sweeten the song tracks that have come back, which means that I replace the rhythm section track with an orchestral track so it sounds as if the orchestra is accompanying the voices in the finished piece. So, there also needs to be new orchestrations written.

The composer's task in a musical is to weave songs and underscore together. When the music is continuous throughout the film, key relationships become very important from one cue to another, and between songs and underscore. There also must be a sonic unity between the songs and underscore. In addition, sometimes the animated story is about animals who need to be given human qualities, as in many of the Disney pictures. Mark Mancina produced many of the songs for *The Lion King*, and wrote the underscore—in addition to producing the songs written by Phil Collins—for *Tarzan*:

When you do an animated movie, it's hard because you're not only scoring the same way you score a normal movie, but you're having to bring a certain sense of realness and humanness to characters that are animated.

Mancina also discusses the need for good collaboration with other musicians, as well as constant awareness of the flow between underscore and songs:

Key relationships between songs and underscore are tremendously important, especially in a movie where the music doesn't stop. Basically, in Tarzan, *the music never stops. There needs to be continuity between the songs and the underscore. I don't like going to a movie, and when the song starts, I yawn, or I start going, "Oh God, here comes the song." I hate that. So does Phil (Collins). One of the ways we achieved a unity between the two elements was by me playing on his songs, and by him playing drums on some of my cues. That way the score and the songs can sound very similar. Not only the key relationships, but also the sonic relationships between cues.*

In addition to collaborating with other musicians, the process also involves collaboration with the production team. Because music is

driving animated films, there is a whole team of people, from the director to the head of the studio, that gives input to the composer and songwriters. Mancina describes this:

> *There's not just one guy that comes in and listens to what I do; there's a group of guys. There's the director, the producer, the executive producer of music, the VP of theatrical, Michael Eisner, Joe Roth, the Chairman of the Board. All of 'em. They're all going to hear it! They're all going to have their own opinions on every note of the music, every frame of film—and they're all going to have something to say about it. Five of them might think it's the best cue they've ever heard me write, and three of them might say "I don't like it, and it's gonna have to be changed."*

Animation can be an interesting, fun, and grueling scoring assignment. There is the opportunity to have fun with the music, as well as write serious underscore. Depending on the project, the composer can use traditional instruments or electronic sounds. The creative scope is wide, and though the process is difficult at times, animation can be among the most inspiring and fun genres of film scoring.

CHAPTER 19

Songs, Soundtracks, and Source Music

If everyone on the movie, from the studio execs all the way down, is in sync and agrees we need a hit song for this movie, then it is a totally great situation because then everyone is shooting for the same goal. But that's never the case and I don't believe that will ever be the case. Even if it is, everyone's vision of what that hit song will be is going to be totally different.
—Jeff Carson

Many films use music besides the instrumental underscore. In addition to the kind of composed score that has been discussed so far, film scores frequently include songs. In musicals, as well as some dramatic films, the actors sing on-camera. Often there is *source music*, music that comes from a source on-screen that the actors can hear—a radio, stereo, live band, or someone singing or playing an instrument. A song can be used in place of instrumental underscore to heighten or comment on the dramatic action. For example, in the last scenes of *Michael Collins,* when Sinead O'Connor sings, "He Walked Through the Fair," the picture alternates between Michael Collins driving to what is ultimately his assassination and his fiancée trying on her wedding gown. This creates a poignant bridge between the two characters in their different locations. When the music for a film is mostly, if not completely, comprised of songs instead of underscore, as in *Pulp Fiction*, *Jerry McGuire*, or *The Big Chill,* it is called a *song score*, or *compilation score.*

There are several ways a song can end up in a film. If an established song is used in a new movie, the producer must obtain the right to use it, either in its original form, or by having a new version, or *cover*, recorded. Alternatively, the producer might commission a new song to be written for the film. Of course, if the movie is a musical, then several songs must be commissioned.

The composer's participation in a score that contains songs will vary from project to project. He may be involved in composing the songs, or he may only compose the underscore. For musicals, the songwriter might also write the underscore, as Alan Menken has done for many Disney films. If the songs are used as source music, then the composer is usually not involved, except when they are instrumentals and can be recorded at the same session as the underscore.

Regardless of whether or not the same composer is used for the underscore and the songs, there are always dramatic considerations to keep in mind when choosing or writing songs for a motion picture. Hopefully, the song will enhance the drama in some way, if it is used in place of underscore. But the hard reality of the entertainment business is that there is always a pull-and-tug between creative considerations and those of commerce and profit, and this duality has a large influence on the use of songs in a film. This chapter discusses the many aspects of using songs in movies and the process that lands a song in the film—from the featured songs in musicals to the more subtle and less memorable, but still dramatically important, songs used as source music.

Commissioned Songs

Many times a producer or director wants a song, or songs, to be written specifically for the film. The obvious case for this is a musical, where there are many songs that are essential to the plot. Another possibility is when a producer wants an individual song either for the main title or end credits, or for an important point in the film. Either way, there may be a music supervisor assigned to the project who assists the composer in facilitating the recording of the songs. The director is usually the decision-maker of what music appears in the film, including both songs and underscore. The director (sometimes the producer) is also involved in the process at the approval level, wanting to make sure the songs are appropriate both musically and lyrically.

Once it is determined that a commissioned song is required, a songwriter or songwriting team views a work print of the film. If the song is to be used in a particular scene, they watch that scene over and over.

They then come up with a tune and lyrics that specifically reflect the content of the film. If the composer of the score is also the composer of the song, the thematic material of the song will often be woven into the underscore. The song may use musical material written by the underscore composer (especially if the underscore composer and songwriter are the same person), or it may be a separate musical statement. The song may be used only in the main title or end-credits, or it could be featured as a dramatic statement in the body of the film. "How Do You Keep the Music Playing," from *Best Friends*, is organic to the score of the picture; Michel Legrand uses the theme in his underscore as well as in the song itself. Lyricist Alan Bergman (who writes as a team with his wife, Marilyn) describes the evolution of "How Do You Keep the Music Playing?":

> *This film has two people involved in a relationship. The woman overcomes the man's resistance to marry, and they go back East to meet their respective families. The visits don't go well, and by the time the honeymoon is over, the marriage is almost over. There is a sequence in which they are on a people-mover in the airport, separated and not talking to each other. It was a marvelous sequence for us [as songwriters] because there are no sound effects or dialogue. Here was an opportunity to find a new way to say, "How do you keep romance alive?"*
>
> *After viewing the entire film several times, we watched this scene over and over again. Then we said to [composer] Michel Legrand, "What if the first line of the song is 'How do you keep the music playing?'" And he said, "I like that." He wrote the whole melody from that line. We then wrote the rest of the lyrics to that melody.*

When writing a new song and tailoring it for a certain movie, writers try to reflect either a single dramatic or emotional moment of the film, or to make a statement about the entire film. In a situation like the one above, it is as close to putting words in the characters' mouths as possible without having them actually sing. This use of a song greatly enhances the story by reflecting exactly what the characters are feeling. In *Up Close and Personal*, the song, "Because You Loved Me," by Diane

Warren was commissioned for that film and used in the end credits. Even though it is not used dramatically in any scenes in the film, the song reflects the feelings of the film's main character, and articulates the emotional thrust of the film.

Sometimes a film maker uses songs containing lyrics that are close to what needs to be expressed, but are not exactly right on. There are many instances where songs are used because the title of the song fits the film, or part of the lyrics fit the film, but the rest does not. A good example of this is *The Big Chill*. This film's opening sequence is a montage where some old college buddies living in different cities find out that one of their old gang has committed suicide. Playing through this montage of several minutes is the original recording of Marvin Gaye singing "I Heard It Through the Grapevine." On the surface, these words fit the scene nicely, for we are seeing all the pals getting the news over the phone. However, these lyrics: "*I bet you're wondering how I knew, 'bout your plans to make me blue ...*" don't really fit the story; they are about a heart-broken guy singing to his girl. The only line that is really relevant is the title line, and this is one reason the song is in the film. Another reason is that it is a song many people know and love, so using it in a film preys upon the audience's familiarity with it—the feeling of nostalgia.

Musicals

Musicals are the ultimate genre where songs are tailored to fit a film. They must be, because the characters are singing them. The words must reflect the story and the music must fit with the overall musical style of the film. The process of writing songs for a musical, whether animated or live action, can be different from that for dramatic-action films. In a dramatic film the songwriters might not be involved until post-production; they probably do not see a script, and develop their ideas from a work print. However, for a musical, the songwriters are involved at an earlier stage. They read the script and discuss with the director where the songs shall go, what the feeling of a song should be, and what the lyric content will be. This is necessary because the songs must be completed before production begins. Then they write the songs, make demos for the production team to hear, make any requested changes, and make a final recording. The final recording is then played back on the set so that the actor(s) can lip-sync accurately. (It is called a *prerecord* when the music is recorded prior to shooting so it can be played back on the set.) This entire process, from writing to release of the film, can take anywhere from one to three years. Note that because all of the recording must be completed before the shooting of a scene, often the songs will be completed as long as a year before the release of the movie.

In writing a score for a musical, songwriters are usually involved with the screenwriters. Alan Bergman talks about the process of creating the music for *Yentl* with songwriting partners Marilyn Bergman and Michel Legrand, as well as Barbra Streisand—producer, director, and star of the film:

> *We agreed that this was a wonderful book for a musical. From the moment Yentl puts on the clothes of a boy and begins the masquerade, she cannot express to anyone her true feelings as a woman. This inner monologue was a perfect opportunity for music.*
>
> *So, first we spotted where the songs should be. Then we started writing. Michel is a dramatist; the best composers are dramatists. For one song, we said to him, "Yentl's father has just passed away. This is the first time she's been away from her village. It's a dark night in a forest and she is alone. In a way, she's pleading with her father." Michel wrote the melody that expressed in musical terms what our thoughts were for this song, and we wrote "Papa, Can You Hear Me."*
>
> *When he writes, or when anybody writes the music first, which we prefer, there are words on the tips of those notes and we have to find them. It's a search.*

Exploring, being a dramatist, finding just the right words to go with a character and a story are the jobs of the songwriter in a musical. These are the songs that are featured and are often the reason the audience goes to see the film.

Source Music

There are many, many instances of songs that are not featured and that are part of the background of the actual scene. *Source music* is any music that appears to be coming from a "source" on screen. Said another way, it is any music the actors in the scene can hear. Car radios, home stereos, bands in a nightclub, street musicians, and actors humming in the shower are all examples of source music. Source music can be familiar songs by known artists, songs by new artists, or music written by the composer specifically for the film. Source music can be strictly in the background as part of the aural landscape along with various sound effects, or it can become a strong dramatic statement.

Songs used as source music are usually chosen by the director, often with the assistance of the music supervisor. In the case of instrumental source music, it can be chosen from existing recordings, the composer can write or arrange something, or another composer can be brought in to do the source cues.

Dramatic Use of Source Music

Often, source music is mixed in the film at barely audible levels; it is frequently part of a room's ambient sound, far in the background. However, there are times when source music can play an important dramatic role in the film. The proper choice of songs can create an atmosphere that runs the gamut of dramatic possibilities. Composers often interweave the source music with the underscore in order to add to a dramatic situation.

For example, in *The Pelican Brief*, there is a scene where Julia Roberts leaves a hospital in fear of her life and ventures down a crowded New Orleans street, eventually ending up alone in a hotel room. The first thing we hear is James Horner's underscore consisting of piano and strings as she leaves the hospital. This fades into source cues as she goes down the street in a state of shock. These source cues consist of different kinds of rock or jazz music emanating from each nightclub she passes, and they blend one into the other as she weaves through the partying crowd. Finally, the underscore fades back in while the last piece of source music fades out (called *cross-fading*). This whole sequence has a continuity because of the way the music is structured. The source music reflects the craziness of the New Orleans nightlife, and as each song fades in and out, we experience what the actor is experiencing. The underscore gives the audience the sense of what she is actually feeling—fear, uncertainty, and confusion—helping to make the transition from the hospital to the street, and eventually to the hotel room.

Source Music to Establish Time or Place

In addition to dramatic usage, source music often establishes a time or place. By using source music that is indigenous to a culture, the feeling of that culture is placed in the mind of the audience. The underscore can then also use elements of the cultural music, or it can be a completely different entity.

There are also countless films that have used source music to establish a time in history, such as *Anne of the Thousand Days, The Madness of King George*, and *Shakespeare In Love* (see chapter 17).

The Composer and Source Music

The composer may or may not be involved in creating source music. It depends on the kind of underscore being written, and whether or not the composer has the musical background to write what is needed. If the movie needs source music describing a specific culture or time period, the composer must have the research and musical skills to write the appropriate music. If the underscore is closely related to the source music, or uses elements of it, it is best to have the composer also write the source music. However, if the source music is in a style unfamiliar to the composer, he will hire someone else to do those cues. In addition, if there are sequences like the one in *The Pelican Brief* described above, then the composer must at least be aware of the key, instrumentation, style and tempo of the source cues.

Whether or not the composer is involved in the source music also depends on dramatic considerations. Often, songs used as source music are taken from existing recordings and the composer is not part

of the selection process. However, there are times when the composer is asked to write a source cue that is not a song, most likely an instrumental of some kind. The composer can utilize the players at the recording session for the underscore to record the source music. This is an efficient way to create source music without getting clearances and having extra recording sessions. In addition, if the composer writes the source music, then the theme for the film can be worked into it, as Alan Silvestri did during the fiesta scene in *Romancing the Stone.*

People often wonder why they don't remember hearing many of the songs on the CD soundtrack in the movie. The answer is, they probably did hear those songs, but they were source cues played for only a few seconds at a very low volume under dialogue. However, many record companies are quite content to have their artist's songs in the film as source cues, as long as they also appear on the soundtrack album. Soundtrack albums are now one of the biggest financial considerations in making a film.

Soundtrack Albums

At one point during the summer of 1998, three of the top five best-selling albums were movie soundtracks. And for the whole year of 1998, twenty-two of Billboard's top 200 albums were also soundtracks. The top selling album of 1998 was the soundtrack to *Titanic*, which grossed $26 million in sales for that year alone and spawned two subsequent *Titanic* soundtracks—one with more songs, and another with James Horner's underscore. During that same year, soundtrack album sales rose by an amazing 36 percent.[1]

With these kinds of numbers, it is no wonder that producers are all hopping on the soundtrack bandwagon, hoping to generate both profit and publicity for their films through the use of songs. This is not a new phenomenon, although the current sales numbers and profit levels are higher than ever. As discussed in chapter 5, from the earliest days of talkies, producers have used songs in films. In today's filmmaking world, this process is not so easy as simply commissioning a songwriter to create a tune for the film; there are many different elements to take into consideration. In an age where the record

companies and film studios are often owned by the same conglomerates, there are several dimensions to the game. Financial considerations, not the creative ones, are often the overriding factors in making a soundtrack. Michael Greene, president of the National Academy of Arts and Sciences, which produces the Grammy awards, discusses this trend:

> *The connection between soundtracks and films has never been more vibrant. Not only have there been more soundtracks issued, but you have to back up and remember some of the reasons why—not the least of which is that many of the film companies are also the owners of the music companies. So they've found a good way to cross-promotionalize the music and films to everybody's advantage.*[2]

There are many films where the use of songs in the film is fabulous, entertaining, and totally appropriate. However, there are many that shoehorn songs into the film in order to get the song on the soundtrack album. The problem is that this often ignores the wishes of the film's creative team: the director, writer, editor, and composer. The people that win most often in the soundtrack game are the record companies, artists, and film producers. The lament frequently heard from those in the creative parts of the film industry is that the "suits," or businessmen, are making decisions that have nothing to do with the quality of the movie—only with the ability to "cross-promotionalize" and increase profits. Truth be told, this is a complaint that has echoed throughout the history of Hollywood, only at no time has it been so loud or futile. Film making is essentially a commercial enterprise, and with the kinds of profits that can be made, there is much motivation to exploit this burgeoning soundtrack market and little motivation to give creative considerations more weight. As music supervisor Jeff Carson says, "How do you make a hit movie *and* a hit soundtrack, and make them work together at the same time?" It is not easy. It can be done, and yet the mystery is that no one really knows which soundtracks will take off and which will be duds.

There are many different paths a particular song can take to find its way into a film. It can be commissioned by the producer; it can be

requested by the director; it can be suggested by the film editor, music editor, or composer; or it can be part of the catalogue of the publishing company that the movie studio happens to own. The film could use the original performance, or record a new version. In all these instances, sync licenses need to be issued, clearances obtained, and royalty deals hammered out. If there are to be recording sessions for a song, someone must produce and oversee them. There are also budgets to adhere to. All of these elements are part of the complex process of bringing a song to a film, a process that is usually managed by the music supervisor.

Music Supervisor

The *music supervisor* is a role that has developed since the late 1970s into what we know today. It is a hybrid of many aspects of the music scoring business. Although there has often been someone with the title "music supervisor" since the earliest days of sound films, the tasks that today's music supervisor fulfills are vastly different from those of his counterpart fifty years ago.

The main job of the music supervisor is to oversee the process of placing songs in a film. These can be songs that are eventually used on the soundtrack album, or songs that are used strictly for source music. The music supervisor communicates with the composer, but does not oversee the composing of the underscore. Also, it is important to know that there are essentially two types of music supervisors: those that simply organize the choosing and clearance of the songs, and those that are musically trained and can produce a recording session as well.

The tasks that a music supervisor fulfills are as follows:

Creating and monitoring budgets. Since the music supervisor is often doing some of the actual business negotiations on behalf of the producer, he usually assists in creating a music budget for the film. This can involve budgeting only for the use of songs, if that is what the score is, and can also include overseeing the finances of recording the underscore and hiring the composer. It is also the music supervisor's job to oversee the day-to-day budgets in the recording studio during production of any songs.

Helping to pick the songs. This is often the largest part of the music supervisor's job. Which songs are chosen depends on many factors, including the budget, the director's wishes, the producer's wishes, instructions from the executives at the movie studio, which artists and publishers agree to allow use of their songs, and which artists are available for recording. It can be a difficult and politically complicated labyrinth to negotiate.

Getting clearance for songs. Before a song is used in a movie, permission must be obtained. First, the publisher must grant *sync rights*, the right to synchronize the song with the movie. If the producer or director wants to use the original version of a song, then a second permission must be granted by the owner of the original master-recording—usually the record company. The music supervisor either handles the negotiations for these clearances himself, or hires a music clearance company to do that work.

Record producing. No matter whether it is an old song being rerecorded or a song commissioned for the film, the music supervisor often produces the recording session. This job is often done by the film composer if he wrote or co-wrote the song, and sometimes an outside record producer is contracted. But even then, the music supervisor makes sure these sessions go smoothly and stay on budget. Whether old songs are re-recorded or not depends on how much money the record company wants for the use of the original master. Sometimes it is cheaper to use the master; sometimes it is cheaper to redo it.

Recommending the composer. Because the music supervisor is often involved in the project at an early date, often he is asked to recommend a composer he considers appropriate for the film, and who fits the budget.

Overseeing the temp track. Often the music supervisor is part of the team, with the music editor and director, that chooses the music and builds the temp track.

Overseeing music performed on camera. If there is a scene where the actors are singing or dancing, the music supervisor will be present to ensure that everything is going well. This means making sure the playback is correct and that the lip-syncing is accurate.

As mentioned above, helping to pick the songs for the film is a large part of the music supervisor's job. Although the process can sometimes go fairly smoothly, many, many problems can arise in the clearing of publishing rights, as well as clearing the use of original masters. In addition, there are often many different voices trying to influence the song selection process. Producers and directors often request specific songs; some are reasonable requests, some are out of the range of their budget, and some will not be released by the artist, record company, or publisher. There is the screenwriter, who may have written the idea for a specific song into the script. Then there is the movie studio, which might own a certain record company, and they want to promote its artists. The film editor, who has worked with the film for several months, has his own ideas. And there are even the spouses of these people that can get into the act, because *everyone* has an opinion about music and songs! This situation is familiar to music supervisor, Daniel Carlin:

> *It's not just picking any song that will work. Anybody that listens to the radio can do that. We've got to have a budget. We've got to think about a soundtrack deal, we've got to think about the politics. For example, say I go in and I put this great Mariah Carey song into a scene. What if the budget is $300,000 for 30 songs and I have just spent $100,000 of the budget? Because the director falls in love with it and will not have it any other way, that does not do anybody any good. Now everybody is fighting. The director is fighting with the studio, and somebody goes, "Who is the jerk that put this Mariah Carey song in there in the first place?" I don't what to be the guy who raises his hand.*

The music supervisor is often caught in the crossfire of these situations because he is the one handling the songs. And it often comes back to the idea that movie making is a balance, and not always a delicate one, between creativity and commerce. When so many different powers are trying to influence the use of songs, it can get diplomatically difficult for the music supervisor.

Jeff Carson:

> *Music supervision is kind of like trying to thread five needles at once, or hit five bulls-eyes all at once. It's very difficult to hit five bulls-eyes all at once. You're trying to accommodate the movie with the right music, you're trying to please the director, the producer, the studio executives, the studio's music department. Everybody.*

There is no one rule, or guide, for how much a song will cost. If it is going to be the title of the movie, obviously the owner of the copyright will ask for more money. If it is a well-known song by a well-known artist, then that will cost more than an unknown song by an up-and-coming artist. Daniel Carlin creates a hypothetical example of the kinds of negotiations that take place:

> *There is no law or rule about this stuff. You go to the publisher with hat in hand, and you say, "Here's our movie, here's our budget, and here's how much money we have to spend. Can you help us out?" And it depends. I mean if it's a one-hundred-million-dollar movie, they're not going to give you the song for eight thousand. But if you make a three-million-dollar movie, and you can them tell it's a labor of love for everybody, then they might say: "Here's what I'll do for you, I'll make a deal if you use five of our songs, and I'll give them to you for $6,500 each." And that way they get paid not only what I pay them for the songs, but then, when it goes on television, they get those residuals. Then it gets released overseas and gets more residuals. So they make up a package deal. The volume helps them, and it helps me too. And it also means that I'm not going to put in a competing singer. I'm gonna have five of their songs, and it makes everybody's life easier.*

As you can see, there are countless ways that songs can be used in a film, and many different motives for using them. The balance between creative and financial considerations is a tricky one that everyone in the film-making business experiences. Unfortunately, everyone involved rarely shares the same vision for the music, especially when there are songs involved. Because royalties and sales profits generated from songs and soundtrack albums are enormous, there are many interested people other than the film makers who try to sway the choices. The director might want it one way, the producer another, the movie studio a third, and an interested record company a fourth. There are often two conflicting goals in the choosing of what kind of music to have: the creative choice, based on the director's vision for the film; and the commercial choice, which is based on what will make the most money, both in soundtrack album sales and in helping to promote the popularity of the film. The music supervisor guides the process of choosing songs, whether they are intended for a soundtrack album or not. And hopefully he is able to guide the process towards serving the drama as well as serving the financial bottom line.

PART IV

The Business of Film Scoring

CHAPTER 20

Making the Deal: Agents, Attorneys, and Contracts

When we need a lawyer to navigate through the complexities of modern life, we want one who doesn't "miss a beat."
—Don Campbell[1]

Many musicians seem to want to avoid discussing the business aspect of film scoring. They would prefer to be *artistes* who can live in lofty heights above the humdrum, mundane world of money-changing hands. Some are simply scared at having to actually deal with making money doing music. But every artist, every creative person who works for himself, is also in business. Because of the free-lance nature of our work, *we are in business for ourselves* and must learn to handle our financial affairs, deal with contracts, conduct ourselves in negotiations, and make the best deals possible. Many young composers have the impression that they will somehow get a gig writing music for films, be compensated handsomely for their music, and then someone else will handle the money. Unfortunately, this is far from the truth. Many composers have made a very good living writing film music for TV, cable, and documentaries and never have had an agent. Some are lucky enough to have an efficient and honest agent, but who oversees the composer's transactions with the agent? Ultimately, it comes down to every musician having control and being knowledgeable about his own business.

There are several key factors in controlling one's own business and one's own financial destiny. The first, as I mentioned, is knowledge. The more you know about your fee structure, royalties, budgets, expense accounts, taxes, and day-to-day expenses, the more informed are the decisions you make. This can be terribly dry stuff, but it is a part of a composer's livelihood.

Another key factor is organization. Keep a file for all those receipts. When you come home from the music store with a new piece of equipment or book, file that receipt right away under "expenses." Paperwork can be a drag, but if you don't do it, it can come back to haunt you. Keep another file for all your royalty statements, another for tax papers, completed copyright forms, correspondence, etc. In addition, keep your phone numbers organized and don't throw any out! You never know when you will need that duduk player again, even though it has been five years since he played on your session.

Agents and Attorneys

A third key factor in keeping your business affairs in order is to have competent and honest people assist you. These are the attorneys, agents, and financial advisors who have expertise in specific areas.

Many film composers have agents who help the composer obtain jobs, and provide career management. The agent negotiates deals and sees that the terms of a contract are honored. An agent has thorough knowledge of projects in various stages of production, and contacts the producer or director to pitch one of his composers for a project. He constantly networks with people in every facet of the entertainment business, always looking for opportunities for his clients.

Agent David May of the Zomba Group:

> *What we depend on for our work is, number one, our relationships. This includes the music people out at the studios, the major production companies, and the major music supervisors. We are constantly calling them and they are constantly calling us about what they have on their plate and what they are looking for and who we have that might fit the bill. It's our business to be providing them with constant information about our clients, and also to suggest appropriate candidates wherever we can.*
>
> *You want to find out when projects are occurring, when they are going to be looking for a composer, who the key people are that will be influencing that decision, whether you are going through a music producer or music supervisor or directly to the director—just who do you deal with. So, at the appropriate time we can make the calls we need to make to that person, and get our people in there. And then, the next step—once we have some kind of entry, when we know what kind of person they are looking for and what kind of budget they have—we put together music or credits, whatever we can put together to hopefully make them interested in our client.*

Most agents have a roster of composers, so the trick for the composer is to find the agent that works best for him. There is no way that an agent can give his full attention to one composer 100% of the time. For the agent, it is a constant juggling act that also involves an intuitive sense as to which of his clients to pitch for a job. So the composer must also be aggressive in searching out work, and then let the agent handle negotiations once the job is offered.

In 1991, composer Cliff Eidelman had already successfully scored several feature films including *Triumph of the Spirit* and *Crazy People*. He knew that a new *Star Trek* movie was in production, and decided he wanted a shot at it. Without the help of his agent he had a meeting with the director, read the script, and thoroughly notated places he thought music would happen. He also did a sequenced mock-up of several possible cues. His persistence, interest, and willingness to go the extra mile paid off and he got the job, leaving the particulars of the contract to his agent.

Agents welcome this kind of aggressive job seeking by a composer; it makes their job easier. But the good agent will always be looking out for your best interest. Also, the agent must be someone you can trust and count on to be honest and up-front with you.

David May:

> *It's a partnership between an agent and a composer. The theory is that if both of us are doing everything we can, and communicating as frequently as we can, then we're going to stand a much, much better chance in moving a composer's career forward.*

For new composers, it is difficult to get an agent. There is a catch-22: you must have done some work before they will take you on. And then, you are at the low end of the food chain, so to speak. It behooves the composer to pursue his own contacts and gigs as much as possible. When the gigs start coming in, this will get the agent's attention.

Attorneys

Perhaps the most important and most lampooned of all career advisors is the attorney. All shark jokes aside, a good attorney's advice (or an attorney's good advice) is invaluable. For a film score, after the agent negotiates the deal, the attorney reviews the terms of the contract. He may negotiate through your agent, or negotiate directly with movie producers. He also may make deals with publishers and record companies, and will often give career guidance. Your attorney will know exactly how much money you are making, how much you are paying in taxes and how much that new house just cost. Because of this, you need to find an attorney you can trust—someone who you feel is looking out for your best interest. One important thing to remember is *that you are paying this person.* For your hard-earned money, the attorney is performing the services mentioned above. If you don't like the way he conducts himself or his business, you can walk away and find someone else. Many people forget this and feel bound to one lawyer forever. The services of a lawyer are expensive and necessary, but you are the one doing the buying!

Despite all the negative stories we hear about attorneys and agents, there are many good ones out there. In our culture, bad news and negativity get the headlines. Yes, there are many attorneys and agents who are low-lifes, and there are some who get tempted by self-serving fortune, but there are also many who are honest and trustworthy. Use your instinct to find someone who works well for you.

One final note about agents and attorneys: any deal they strike with a producer, publisher, or other executive *must be approved and signed by you.* And that brings us full circle. In order to know that you are making the best decision for yourself, and sometimes for your family, you must be informed and have a good grasp of the issues and items in your contract. Let the attorney and agent give you advice, but don't let them run your life.

Contracts

For a film composer, the financial bottom line is not just the fee received for writing a score, but also the royalties that can be generated for many years after the film is originally released. There are royalties for when the film is shown on TV or when the music from the film is played on the radio or in concert halls. There are royalties generated for music included on a soundtrack album. There are also additional royalties if the film is shown in foreign countries, either in theaters or on TV. If the composer writes or co-writes a song that is included in the film, it can generate another whole branch of the income river. One film score can generate royalties equal to several times the composer's original fee for writing the score. (Royalties are discussed in detail in chapter 22.)

How does this work? Where does all this money come from? Who keeps track of it? Before any music is written, before any money is generated, the composer signs a contract with the producer that specifies the services the composer will provide and the compensation the producer will pay. The terms of this contract coupled with the popularity of the film and its ability to generate royalty income determines how much the composer will make and where the money comes from.

After the composer is offered the gig, then either a *deal memo* or a *short-form contract* is drawn up. The deal memo summarizes the terms the composer and production office have agreed upon, and is the binding legal agreement until the final contract is completed by the attorneys. A short form contract is a little more detailed than the deal memo, but not as detailed as the final contract.

Agent David May:

> *Once we have verbal terms for whatever creative deal we finally come up with, I will typically generate a deal memo. If it's a*

studio, sometimes they will generate it, and different studios have different policies. Sony does a short form agreement first—they don't do deal memos—followed by a long form (contract). Others go straight to a long form, but I want to make sure that there is something on paper as quickly after the verbal agreement has been transacted as possible. Memories can be hazy, and it also is common for weeks, if not months, to go by between making a deal and actually getting a contract. So I don't want to be at that stage arguing with an attorney saying, "No, wait a second, your client agreed to half the publishing." And the attorney is saying, "Well, I don't have anything in my notes there."

Based on the deal memo, attorneys draw up a final *long-form contract.* Where the deal memo is a summary of the terms agreed upon, the final contract is a complex legal document. However, every composer should understand the basic items that are covered. There are many clauses in the film composer's contract that must be addressed and approved. Some of the important ones are:

- How much is the fee?
- How will the fee be paid?
- Is it a "package" or "all-in" deal?
- The length of time for composing the score
- Screen credit
- Advertising credit
- Copyright ownership
- Transportation and miscellaneous expenses
- Royalties for other use of the music (other than the film)
- Suspensions/terminations/defaults
- Royalty fees for underscore on soundtrack albums
- Royalties from video sales
- Exclusivity of the composer

Some of these items are fairly straightforward. *Screen credit* refers to how your name appears on-screen and where it is placed in the credits. Before the costume designer, after the cinematographer? Should it read:

Music by
Richard Davis

Or do you want the full treatment:

Music composed, conducted, and orchestrated by
Richard Mark Davis

Advertising credit is similar, referring to where and how your name is placed in newspaper, magazine, and billboard ads.

Transportation and expenses is for going out of town to record or do research. Will they fly you first class or coach? Will they pay for your spouse? How much per-diem? Many composers think this item is unnecessary, as they do all their work in Los Angeles or New York. But with many sessions happening outside of these cities for various reasons, this item needs to be negotiated up-front, and not left to see if it is actually needed.

Exclusivity of the composer means that the composer will not work on other projects during the time that he is committed to the one indicated in the contract. This is a protection for the producer to insure that they get your full attention. Composers are freelance and are always juggling schedules and projects, and the producer is investing a lot of money in your coming through for him. So it makes sense from the producers standpoint that you are working exclusively for him during the specified time. Another variation of this clause is "*non-exclusive, but first priority.*" This means that the composer may work on other projects at the same time, but must give the other party of the contract first priority.

It is worth adding at this point that I believe in putting everything in writing, even when dealing with friends. There is nothing like a written agreement in the form of a contract or deal memo to prevent misunderstandings down the line. It is actually a protection for both parties in the event that one person has a different interpretation of

what was agreed upon several months before. Or in a worst-case scenario, if one party tries to deliberately misrepresent or distort the agreement, a written contract can settle the dispute. Gentleman's agreements are lovely, altruistic, and philosophically desirable—we all want to believe that our business partners are honorable. But in reality, verbal agreements sealed on a handshake can be somewhat quaint if not just plain bad business. If ever someone actually tries to avoid signing a written contract or a deal memo with you, walk out the door as fast as possible! This is a sure indication of a person who knows they cannot or will not honor the terms of your verbal agreement and just wants to take you for a ride.

The contract is a supremely important document. It is your security that certain terms have been agreed to by both sides. It must be clear, complete, and fully understandable by an unrelated third person (another attorney, etc.)

Two of the most important issues in the film composer's contract are the composer's fee, and package deals. There are several dimensions to both these items, and they require in-depth discussion.

Composer Fees

The first payment the composer receives on a film is the first installment of his composing fee. When we refer to a fee in this sense, it means that the producer is paying the composer for writing the music. If the composer accepts a straight fee, as opposed to a "package deal," then he is not responsible for any music production costs, e.g., studio time, orchestrators, musicians, etc. Fees for a feature film can cover a wide range, from about $25,000 for a low-budget film and a relatively unknown composer, to over $700,000 for a "name" composer on a big-budget feature. For TV, cable TV, documentaries, and cartoons, fees are less and depend on the total budget of the project.

Note: It used to be the rule of thumb that the complete music budget, including composer, musicians, music editors, recording studio, etc., would be a certain percentage of the film's overall budget, often in the range of 1.5 to 3%. If the film's total budget was $50 million, the music

budget would be between $500,000 and $1.5 million. However, that practice is no longer in use. Some movie budgets are as high as $200 million, and music costs have not risen proportionately.

There are several ways the composer's fee can be paid. Often the fee is paid in three parts: the first when the spotting is completed and the composer begins writing, the second at the beginning of recording the music, and the third at the completion of the dubbing session. Sometimes a specific number of weeks are written in the contract, like "*the composer shall commence services on the spotting date of the picture and will complete the score within 12 consecutive weeks from that date.*" Sometimes the completion date is tied into the post-production schedule. Other contracts give a specific month, day, and year by which the composer shall deliver the finished (recorded) score. If the composer is needed beyond the set time frame in the contract, there is another clause that provides additional compensation.

Package Deals

One of the newest wrinkles of the past decade, and most important factors in determining fees, fee payment schedules, and music delivery dates, is the *package deal.* Also known as the *all-in deal,* this is when the composer agrees to accept a certain amount of money in return for getting the music produced and recorded. Many low-budget films, cable and television films, and episodic television shows work this way. As opposed to receiving a fee for composing the music with the producer paying for all production-related costs, in the package deal, the composer is responsible for these costs with some possible exceptions.

Since the biggest cost outside of the composer's fee is hiring the musicians and recording studio, when a composer accepts a package deal, they are often planning on producing most, if not all of the music electronically. Many high profile composers now accept deals like this. For example, Mark Snow's music for the *X-Files* TV series is produced in his home studio with the occasional live musician (that *he* must pay). James Horner and Mark Isham are but two prominent composers who have recently done feature films as package deals. Many other com-

posers with extensive electronic set-ups are happy to accept a package deal for they know how fast they can work, and what is financially viable for them.

The danger to the composer in a package deal is that if he miscalculates, the recording session, or other related costs, may escalate beyond his original budget. Then the composer can be responsible for paying the extra costs out-of-pocket in order to deliver the final music. However, there are often exclusions to what the composer is responsible for, and these vary from deal to deal. In lower-budget deals, the composer tends to be responsible for more of the music production costs than in major feature films. Some of these exclusions for which the feature film producer is normally responsible are:

- Music editing costs
- Licensing of songs if not written by the composer
- Dolby and noise-reduction system costs
- Mag stock and transfer
- Reuse, new use, and other payments to union musicians
- Rescoring for creative reasons not due to the fault or omission of the composer

The final item on this list is extremely important. It protects the composer from directors or producers that make arbitrary, capricious, and frequent changes in the film, or ask for many changes in the music. Often a specific number of minutes of music will be agreed upon as a ceiling, and if this number is exceeded, the composer is entitled to extra fees.

The advantage to the composer of a package deal is that if he works quickly and enjoys working with synthesizers and samplers, a good profit can be made. And don't forget all those royalties coming down the road. The disadvantage is that the pressure of music production and the music budget is on the composer's shoulders. The reality of

the film scoring business today is that in many instances, if a composer does not agree to the package deal, they will not get the job. The producer will simply find someone who will agree.

Mark Isham speaks about package deals:

> *A real important point for newcomers to understand is, because you're a newcomer you're probably going to get package-dealed from the beginning these days. It's very rare to just walk in and have someone say, "Here's a fee and we'll pay any costs you have." That's not going to happen unless you have a champion who says, "Look, I really want you to score this and I'll take care of it. Don't worry about a thing."*
>
> *The important thing to remember is that everything is negotiable. You can negotiate for gross points. You can negotiate for album points. You can negotiate for publishing. You can negotiate for how many musicians you guarantee to employ. Every aspect of a package deal is negotiable. And make sure you do your homework, because if you miscalculate, and you agree contractually to supply 20 strings for 40 minutes of music, you better know what that's going to cost you. And you better do things like go to the director and say, "I will accept this on the terms that you sign off on everything that I play for you in demo form." Sometimes the director is sitting on the scoring stage and says, "What if this were faster?" Then you're looking at writing more music, changing your tempo, and somehow getting new music on the stand while the musicians are waiting for you. That could eat up your profit right there. So it's very crucial that you have a good line of communication with your director. Even if you can't get it in writing that they'll sign-off on the mock-ups, at least, man-to-man, get them to agree that this is a package deal, and you're going to try to help each other.*

Agent and attorney David May also speaks to the package deal issue:

> *The package needs more definition and it needs to be more limited [than a "straight fee" deal]. Otherwise the composer can lose*

his shirt. What we'll do then is define what the package includes, and what it doesn't. What I try to do is limit it to certain number of minutes of music, limit to a certain number of live players, so if we agree to a package of $65,000 but for that there is no more than 35 minutes of music, no more than ten live musicians. We try to limit it in every way possible so that they realize that if they want more than that, then they've got to pay more than the package amount. I really talk to the composer to make sure, before we agree to it, that the composer does a rough budget to make sure he can make what he wants to make. I'm always telling composers, you are in fact entitled to make a living at this.... But things happen, you want this, the director wants that, and that $30,000 profit ends up being whittled down to $17,000. I'm trying to avoid that.

Package deals need to be approached with care and planning. Everything must be in writing, and communication with the director/production office must be clear. The best package-deal situation is when you are planning to produce most, if not all, of the music in your home studio. As soon as you venture into the world of studios, engineers, and live musicians, you are leaving yourself open to cost overruns for which you may or may not be protected contractually. But the package deal is a way of life, especially for low-budget features, episodic television, and television movies. Learn how to budget a package deal so you can make a reasonable amount of money when you get the opportunity.